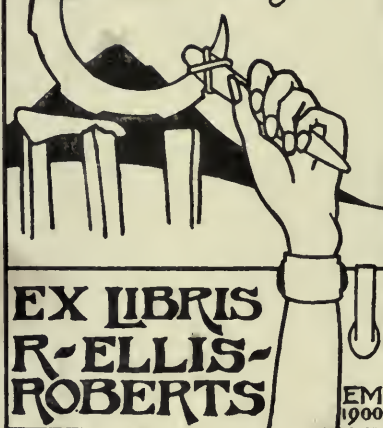


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C O M E D I E S B Y A L F R E D
DE MUSSET: TRANS-
LATED AND EDITED, WITH
AN INTRODUCTION, BY S. L.
GWYNN.

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CONTENTS.

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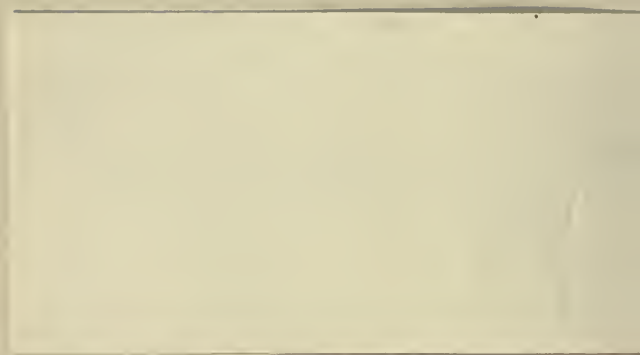
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INTRODUCTION.



ALFRED DE MUSSET was born December 11, 1810, and died May 2, 1857. It was as a poet that he desired to be known, and on his poetry his fame rests; but of the nine volumes which comprise his work, verse fills only two. His plays (of which "Louison" alone, perhaps the least poetic of all, is in metre) fill two more volumes; the rest is made up of short novels, tales, a few essays in criticism of literature, acting, and painting; and the famous "Confession of a Child of the Age."

The history of his life is far from inspiriting. Heine, whom of all writers De Musset most resembles by his lyrical gift and his Ishmaelitish turn of mind, condensed it into the cruel sentence, "He is a young man who has had a splendid past." But Heine summed up the verdict of criticism with a kindlier epigram, when he said of De Musset that "the Muse of

Comedy kissed him on the lips, but the Muse of Tragedy on the heart."

The second son of a high official under the first Empire, and descended from an old and good family, Alfred de Musset was born into society's inner circle. He grew into a pretty, fair-haired, nervous boy, precocious in mind, and singularly infantine in character, whose chief delight was to represent scenes out of his "dear 'Arabian Nights.'"

At eighteen he became a member of Victor Hugo's "Cénacle," the centre of Romanticism militant; and at nineteen published his first volume of poetry, which created a scandal and a sensation easily to be imagined. Society took up the brilliant young author, and petted him as it petted Byron. For four flaming years he was dandy and poet combined, plunging into amorous adventures, gambling, drinking, and composing in the intervals Byronic verse with all Byron's facility and something of Byron's disregard for form. Thus began that existence of alternating extremes which De Musset never abandoned, and which his poetry so plainly reflects. For the display and glitter of such a life he had the love of an imaginative child. In his fits of gloom he would discard his irreproachable costumes, and wrap himself in a huge and ancient ulster, resisting consolation with the protest, "Leave me,

leave me in my rags and my despair." When he sketches with tragic eloquence, at the opening of his "Confession," a world worn out by the fever of Napoleon's wars, it is in the modern black coat that he sees the "terrible symbol" of an age in mourning for its lost illusions.

No doubt in all this there is much of the artist's love of symbolism, with something of the poet's power to see the great in the little, but much too of the child; and all accounts agree that it was as a child, and a spoiled child, that his friends were obliged to treat him. His monstrous egotism is partly atoned for by its infantine unconsciousness, and his whole character has the charm of a wayward child. But every spoiled child will cry for the moon sooner or later, and it was De Musset's fate among the rest. The moon he cried for was an ideal love; and the ideal with De Musset meant simply the unattainable. It is a child's fancy, changing from hour to hour (Fantasio describes it), not the sum of a man's ordered hopes and aspirations—not a pole-star, but a will-of-the-wisp. The web of his nature is idealism shot with cynicism—a cynicism as puerile as his idealism. It is as though, failing to reach the moon, he should determine to make a Cynthia of the first green cheese; then detecting his self-chosen imposture, impart to the world

in eloquent sorrow that all moons were no better than a preparation of sour milk devoid of all light save what their visionary admirers chose to import. None the less, it is worth noting that De Musset, not contented, like a Congreve, with leading the fashion and dragging vanquished ladies after his triumphal car, sighed for a union of souls, and was inspired with his first serious attachment by a woman who appealed first to his intellect.

His *liaison* with George Sand commenced in the end of 1833 ; the journey to Italy took place in 1834, and the final rupture in 1835. The story of this trip and interrupted union has been shadowed forth by her in "Elle et Lui," published after his death, and by him in the "Confession" written soon after the events. As regards De Musset's part in the affair, both accounts agree in attributing to him the perfect unreasonableness, the light-hearted egotism, and the will to wound at any cost which he has represented in Perdican. But the crash of his ideal, elusory though it was, was a real sorrow to De Musset, as a child's sorrow is real for the child. He came back from Italy an altered man ; none the less, he had profited by the connection. George Sand's robust good sense swept away the Byronic affectations of his adolescence ; and his most famous work in poetry is directly inspired

by the memory of this disappointment. In 1835, after two years had passed since the publication of his last poem, De Musset one night shut himself up in his room, lighted with all available candles, and decorated with ferns and flowers. The night thus spent produced the famous "Night of May," where the Muse appears to recall the poet to his allegiance. She bids him, in words too famous to be translated, to find an immortality in the expression of his sorrow, and feed the world on his own heart's blood. "The wound is closed," said the poet to his brother; "it will never reopen again save poetically"—a prediction which he fulfilled (always to accompaniment of candelabra) in the three other "Nights" (August, December, and October), and the no less brilliant poem entitled "Un Souvenir."

Five years of great literary activity followed. In 1830 "A Venetian Night," the first of the comedies, had been played and roundly hissed. Discouraged by this failure, De Musset did not again brave the stage, till in 1847 "A Caprice" was played with great success. Before the journey to Italy "Fantasio" was published, like almost all its author's work, in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, then in its infancy. "On ne badine pas avec l'amour" was the first thing written on his return, and we can trace plainly in Camille some traits of George Sand's masculine

nature. It is worth noting that whereas in "Fantasio" and "A Venetian Night" the woman is the slighter character, in almost all the plays of later date it is the man who is capricious and passionate, while reason and fortitude take up their abode with the other sex.

After 1840, that is to say after the poet had completed his thirtieth year, begins the passage from dissipation to debauchery. Up to 1850 his work, though it shows perhaps increased mastery of style, is slighter in character, and the stream runs scantily and intermittently. The little proverb, "*Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*," is a delightful production of this period; while "*Carmosine*," written in 1850, is perhaps his most delicate and fanciful essay in sentimental comedy.

In society he was always popular, and never lacked for devoted friends; but after 1850, with declining health he lived on, in the intervals of drunkenness, an amiable and brilliant talker, and the wreck of a genius.

He had lived through two revolutions in his country, but kept himself always apart from political action—an inactivity which is emphasised by the prominent parts played by Hugo and Lamartine. His partial biographer can cite of him no laudable traits except acts of an unreflecting generosity, and a more praiseworthy sympathy with distress; and a

literary conscience that saved his Pegasus from job-work.

Yet the austerity of English opinion (so little revered abroad) ought not to pronounce too hasty a judgment on this incarnation of all that is displeasing in the French character to the average Briton. The picture of a man's character is the history of his actions, unless he be a thinker, when it is the history of his mind; or a poet, and it is the history of his feelings. De Musset's actions show him as amiable, generous, sympathetic, but a spoilt child, who never learnt self-denial or self-control, fickle, unreliable, even unmanly. Take him as a thinker, and you find that his puerility of ideas is only thrown into relief by the magnificent expression given to sophistical reasonings or vulgar morality; but study the man behind his works, and you can scarcely fail to prefer the De Musset of 1850 to the De Musset of 1835.

If we do not know him it is not for want of portraits. He is Fantasio avowedly; and Fantasio's wildest pranks were hardly more original than their author's. It is the child still playing stories out of the "Arabian Nights" with grown men and women for puppets. When he takes himself seriously he is Perdican; and Rosemberg is a humorous sketch of his first youth. But in all these earlier plays he loves to represent one side of his character at a time, and even, as in the

scene between Spark and Fantasio, to contrast in two personages the curious oppositions of which he was conscious in his own nature. This is done on a larger scale in "*Les Caprices de Marianne*," one of his cleverest pieces, where he is by turns the scoffing Bohemian and the sighing hero. In his "*Idyll*" he is Albert celebrating pure wedded love; he is Rodolphe singing the pleasures of change. In the later plays we find his matured character not shown in streaks, but in its dominant aspect. The Count has all his mannerisms, if we may trust Paul de Musset, but he represents also, like the Troubadour Minuccio in "*Carmosine*," the poet's ideal portrait of himself, and when the softening of age had added mellowness and worth to his nature.¹

Throughout all, however, he is the same—whether serious or in jest, drunk or sober, sighing or scoffing, always eloquent, witty, and impassioned by turns; always, and without a moment's exception, always in love.

It was De Musset who christened himself the "*Child of the Age*"; yet in some respects he is curiously little influenced by his surroundings. In politics he is a Liberal, but by sympathy an

¹ In playing these and similar parts in De Musset's plays, Delaunay, the actor, it is said, used to make up into a startling likeness of the author.

aristocrat. The religious speculations of his day find an echo in the opening of "Rolla," which expresses the blankness of a world from which Christ had been taken; but I do not think that theological sorrows sat heavy on De Musset's soul. Yet in his pre-occupation with such a subject he is no doubt a child of the age; he takes the thoughts and feelings that were in the air, just as did his own Dupont or Durand. But his religious and moral speculations are those of the average Parisian, and only valuable as curiosities. On the contrary, as a poet, and as a writer, he is, in a sense, as nearly original as it is possible to be.

He was born into the midst of a literary revolution. The Romantic movement had done two great things for literature. It had regenerated its spirit; it had remoulded its form. It had liberated the vocabulary; it had restored the imagination to its rights. De Musset, like the rest, profited by the freedom others had gained; but while he shakes himself clear from the grip of a purism which weeded the vocabulary, as a gardener weeds out old-fashioned plants, resisting at the same time every attempt to enrich the tongue with new terms, he does not, like Gautier or Hugo, load his pages with unfamiliar words or turns of phrase gleaned out of ancient writers.

Again, while the classical models were as lax with regard to rhyme as they were unbending over the laws of metre, De Vigny and the rest of the Romantics sought to re-establish the old variety of metrical forms along with the disused richness of rhyme. De Musset in his first poems follows their example, but after a short period of discipleship declared revolt. Yet though he does not share their idolatry of Ronsard and his "Pleiade," in one or two of his songs (notably Fortunio's in the "Chandelier," *Barberine's*, and the lovely stanzas written in Italy, "A Saint Blaize, à la Zuecca") he has a bird-like simplicity and ease that bring him nearer to the early lyrists of France or England than any other poet of his nation has approached. No other French poet of modern times has the note of song so pure and fresh.

It is by the spirit rather than by the form of his works that De Musset belongs to the Romantic school. The canons of poetry established by the authors of the "Grand Siècle," and formulated by Boileau, made lyrical verse impossible save in the lightest kinds. The proof is, that from Corneille to André Chénier (who perished in the Terror) not a single lyric worth remembering was composed in French.

Propriety ("the least of all laws and the best

obeyed") determined that expressions of personal feeling were in bad taste, whether in verse or prose, in a drawing-room or in a library. Lamartine, first in verse as Rousseau in prose, set convention at defiance, and wrote of the subjects natural to lyrical poetry, which is in its essence the expression of strong feeling, just as the ballad or the epic is the picture of action. Henceforward there was a new poetry in French, which demanded approval, not of the reason but of the feelings. What is expected of the poet is no longer skill in conforming to a set of rules which claimed the sanction of Horace and Aristotle, as the law of the Pharisees professed to represent the canon of Moses, but temperament, delicacy, and depth of feeling. The poet's art consists in moving, by the quality or power of his emotion, kindred feeling in us. In De Musset's Stanzas to the memory of Malibran, which rank with his finest work, this view of art is set forth with a rare eloquence. He is himself, and he knows it, a poet by temperament, and in virtue of his temperament; joining to an artist's eye for physical beauty (he drew admirably) a susceptibility almost morbid to all manner of impressions, so that with him the commonest pleasures and pains assume half the intensity of passion. It has been said he imitated Lamartine. True, he holds in common with his predecessor the intense personal character of his

work ; but it is so personal as to refute the mere idea of imitation.

He impresses us indeed rather by the amount than by the quality of his feeling. We give him our sympathy, as it were, in spite of ourselves ; he fascinates rather than attracts us. It is the vice of his method that, while he makes us feel the force of his grief, he does not convince us of the worthiness of its occasion. He has one theme, and only one, though he presents it in all imaginable phases—and that theme is Love. I could not understand, he says in his "Confession," that a man could have any other business than to love. It was, he held, the natural state of man to be in love ; but as to what or whom he loves, that is an affair independent of his will. It is like a malady that seizes you—and leaves you—by no choice of your own. Love carries only one obligation—sincerity. It is disloyalty to feign love where love has ceased to exist ; to cease loving would be to shut the heart against its most generous emotion ; but to change from one love to another is as pardonable as it is natural. That is the creed of his "Confession" ; and it is in a relation of this nature that he seeks the ideal.

The truest genius on this view is the power to love greatly ; the true lover is born to his vocation, like a poet or a cook. But De Musset chose to shut his

eyes to the fact that, if genius is inborn, yet it needs effort to employ it; and effort implies will. Genius, like love, is an imperious master; but to him love meant self-abandonment, not self-command. This is the heaviest count against De Musset; he corrupted literature with vicious sentiment. He is argumentative, and preaches an inverted Rochefoucauld: vice is only virtue in disguise; the heresy of sentimentalism. It would be breaking a butterfly on the wheel to reason with his "logic of the heart." There is no possible conclusion to be drawn from his tirades, save that ginger is hot in the mouth. Yet one thing remains. You may deny his premises, you may demur at his conclusions, but you cannot altogether shut your ears against his eloquence. George Sand in her book again and again testifies to this terrible persuasiveness, and he was conscious of it himself; since, though Perdican's rhapsodies break like a wave on Camille's cold logic, yet in defiance of everything it is the man who persuades.

His eloquence, his passion, and his picturesqueness are of themselves enough to ensure his fame; and it is on these, for instance, that M. Taine grounds his famous panegyric. It is perhaps rather as a humorist that he would appeal most to the average Englishman. Gaiety is what is most natural to De Musset, and it is when he writes gaily that his work is freest from all

trace of affectation. Unsurpassed in the lighter forms of verse, he has left in his comedies a fantastic world peopled with delightful inhabitants. His longest play, "Lorenzaccio," in spite of fine scenes, is an incoherent mass of lurid horrors; but throughout most of the comedies gaiety is predominant—a gaiety that is tempered with charming pathos, as in "Barberine," and that passes into real tragedy in "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." He has wit and to spare; but he has, rarest of all qualities in France, a humour really Shaksperian—like the humour of "As you like it," or "The Taming of a Shrew."

There is something of Shakspeare's prodigality too in these comedies; the same swallow-like movement of the fancy, the same ease of flight; but there is none of Shakspeare's reserve. Sometimes De Musset seems as if trying to shake off the fetters of language, and make his phrase keep pace with the turns and dartings of actual thought; to make the words not represent but coincide with the play of the mind. How surprising is the skill that develops all Fantasio's wayward vagaries with insensible transition from one to the other while relating them ingeniously to the plot! And what delicate tact again that, amid all this wild buffoonery of the intellect, keeps the stage clear of any suspicion of horseplay!

As for Barberine, she is certainly a cousin of Portia's. You might read her sermon to Rosenberg after Portia's speech before the Duke, and never think the worse of it. Rosenberg's cynicism and his aunt Beatrix are delightful. One might say of the author as Barberine says of him, "There is not much harm in this boy."

The little comedy of the Count and the Marquise holds the stage best of all. Nothing in De Musset, who makes his proverbs as he goes along, is fuller of the phrases that stick like burs. One remembers, as one reads it, the author's reply to Scribe when Scribe asked, "How do you manage it? I write with no idea but to amuse the people, and yet I cannot make them laugh as you do." "Ah," said De Musset, "but I write to amuse myself." It would be impossible better to define the artistic spirit.

Except in the farcical pieces, such as "*Il ne faut jurer de rien*," and "*On ne saurait penser à tout*," these comedies are poetry throughout, just as "*Much ado about Nothing*" is poetry. But they are written in a style peculiar to them; a sort of balanced prose which combines the utmost finish of workmanship with an appearance of absolute spontaneity. "Nobody but a poet," said Sainte Beuve, "could have written that dainty prose,"—the despair of a translator.

Of his other prose works I have not space to treat.

The "Confession" is interesting, though overcharged in style. Occasionally the sublime passes perilously near the side of the ridiculous. Of his tales, his favourite and the best was the story of Titian's son, who, after producing one masterpiece, the portrait of his mistress, abandoned the laborious pursuit of excellence to devote himself wholly to his passion. In depicting this treason to the cause of art, De Musset, then in the plenitude of his powers, not obscurely shadowed forth the inglorious termination of his own magnificent career.

S. L. GWYNN.

DE MUSSET'S COMEDIES.

BARBERINE.

COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

(1835.)

Dramatis Personæ.

BEATRIX OF ARAGON (*Queen of Hungary*).

COUNT ULRIC (*a Bohemian nobleman*).

ASTOLPHE DE ROSEMBERG (*a young Hungarian baron*).

CHEVALIER ULADISLAS (*chevalier of fortune*).

POLACCO (*a pedlar*).

BARBERINE (*wife to Ulric*).

KALEKAIRI (*a young Turkish attendant*).

Courtiers, etc.

The Scene is laid in Hungary.

BARBERINE.

—♦—
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.
—♦—

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.—*Rosemberg. The Host.*

(A road in front of a hostelry. In the background a Gothic castle, among the mountains.)

Ros. What! no lodging for me! no stable for my horses!—a barn! a miserable barn!

Host. I am extremely sorry, sir.

Ros. Who are you speaking to, pray?

Host. Pardon me, my gay young lord. If it only lay with my inclination, the whole of my poor house should be heartily at your service. But you are not unaware that this hostelry is on the road to Albe Royale, the august abode of our kings, where from time immemorial they have been crowned and buried.

Ros. I know that well, since I am bound thither.

Host. Gracious heavens! you are for the wars?

Ros. Address your questions to my grooms, and see to

giving me the best room in your rascally hovel, and that without more ado.

Host. Oh! my lord, that is impossible. On the first floor there are four Moravian barons, on the second a lady from Transylvania, and on the third, in a little room, a Bohemian count, my lord, with his wife, a great beauty.

Ros. Turn them out.

Host. Ah! my dear lord, you would not wish to be the cause of a poor man's ruin? Since we have been at war with the Turks, if you only knew the numbers of people that pass through here!

Ros. Well, what do these folk matter to me? Tell them I am called Astolphe de Rosemberg.

Host. That may very likely be so, my lord, but that is no reason——

Ros. You would play at impertinence, I presume. If once I raise my whip——

Host. It is not the action of a man of quality to maltreat decent folk.

Ros. (threatening him). Ah! you would chop logic? I will teach you——

SCENE II.

(The same. Several valets run up. The Chevalier Uladislas comes out of the inn.)

Chev. (on the doorstep). What is this, gentlemen? Why, what is the matter?

Host. I take you to witness, Sir Knight. This young lord is picking a quarrel with me because my hostel is full.

Ros. I pick a quarrel with you, boor! Quarrel with a fellow of your sort?

Host. A fellow, sir, of whatever sort he be, has always a sort of back, and if any one comes and administers a sort of cut with a stick to him——

Chev. (advancing to the Host). Never vex yourself; don't be frightened; I will set things to rights. (*To Rosenberg.*) My lord, I give you greeting. You are going to the court of Hungary?

(*Host and valets retire.*)

Ros. Yes, Chevalier; it is my first appearance, and I am in haste to get there.

Chev. And you complain, as I gather, of finding the road blocked?

Ros. Certainly that does not please me.

Chev. It is true that this little affair with the unbelievers, which we have on hand, is drawing a monstrous great wave of people to the court. There are few men of spirit who don't want to have a hand in it, and I myself have taken a part. This is what renders us difficult of approach.

Ros. Oh, as for that, indeed! I did not mean to stay long in this hotel. It was the rogue's tone that irritated me.

Chev. If that be so, Lord ——

Ros. Rosenberg.

Chev. Lord Rosenberg, I am called the Chevalier Uladislas. It is not for me to sound my own praises, but the least acquaintance with what is passing in our armies must make my name familiar to you. Yours is not strange

to me. I have met Rosembergs at Baden. (*Rosemberg bows.*) So if you are only passing through here——

Ros. Yes. Only stopping for breakfast and to rest my horses.

Chev. I was at table, and eating an excellent fish from Lake Balaton, when the sound of your voice reached my ears. If you are not afraid of the neighbourhood of my men-at-arms, and an old soldier's company, I bid you heartily welcome to a place at our meal.

Ros. I gladly accept your offer and count myself highly honoured.

Chev. Pray step in then, I beg of you. A good dish done to a turn is like a pretty woman; it won't wait.

Ros. I know that very well. Plague on it, talking of pretty women—(*Enter Ulric and Barberine by another door of the inn*)—it seems to me that there is one——

Chev. You have not bad taste, young man.

Ros. Without being blind—— Do you know her?

Chev. Do I know her? Assuredly. She is the wife of a Bohemian nobleman. Come along and you shall hear all about it. (*They go into the house.*)

SCENE III.

Ulric. Barberine, leaning on his arm.

Barb. So I must leave you here.

Ulric. For a short while. I will soon come back.

Barb. So I must let you go, and return to that old chateau, where it is so lonely waiting for you.

Ulric. I am going to see your uncle, dear. Why so sad to-day?

Barb. It is you should answer that. You will be back soon, you say. If that is so, I am not sad. But are you not sad yourself?

Ulric. When the sky is heavy like this, with rain and fog, I never know what to do with myself.

Barb. My dear lord, I beg a favour of you.

Ulric. What a winter is preparing for us! What roads, what weather! Nature huddles herself together, shivering as if all living things were going to die.

Barb. I entreat you, in the first place, to listen to me, and in the second place, to grant me a favour.

Ulric. What would you have, my life? Forgive me. I don't know what is the matter with me to-day.

Barb. Nor I either: I don't know what is the matter with you; and the favour you shall do me, Ulric, is to tell your wife what it is.

Ulric. Why, good heavens! I have nothing to tell—no secret.

Barb. I am not a Portia: I will not give myself so much as a pin prick to prove that I am courageous. But you are not a Brutus either, and you have no desire to kill our good king, Mathias Corvin. Listen, we will not have any big words or protestations; I shall not need to fall on my knees. You have a grief. Come close to me; here is my hand; it is the right road to my heart, and your heart will come thither if I call it.

Ulric. As simple as has been your question, so shall my

answer be. Your father was not rich ; mine was, but he dissipated his property. Here is the pair of us, married very young ; and we are the owners of great titles, and very little else. I vex myself because I have not the means to make you rich and happy, as God made you kind and fair. Our income is so petty ; and yet I will not increase it by letting our tenants suffer. They shall never pay in my lifetime more than they paid to my father. I think of taking service under the king and going to court.

Barb. And indeed it is a good plan. The king never failed to receive a nobleman of merit with favour ; and a man like you has never long to wait for fortune.

Ulric. That is true ; but if I go I must leave you here ; for, in order to have this house, where we are so hard put to it to live, one must be sure of the means to live elsewhere, and I cannot make up my mind to leave you alone.

Barb. Why ?

Ulric. You ask me why, and yet what are you doing now ? Have you not just dragged from me a secret that I had resolved to keep hidden ; and what did you need for that ? A smile.

Barb. You are jealous !

Ulric. No, love, but you are fair ! What will you do if I go away ? Will not all the nobles of the country round come prowling along the roads ? And as for me, chasing a shadow far, so far away, shall I not lose my sleep ? Ah, Barberine, out of sight out of mind.

Barb. Listen. God is my witness that I would content myself all my life with the old chateau and the little land we have, if it were your pleasure to live there with me. I rise, I go to the kitchen, to the poultry-yard, I get your dinner ready, I go with you to church, I read a page to you, I sew a thread or two, and so fall asleep contented on your heart.

Ulric. Angel that you are.

Barb. I am angel, but an angel woman. That is to say, if I had a pair of horses we would drive to church behind them. I should not be sorry if my cap had gold trimming, if my skirts were longer, and if that made the neighbours furious. I assure you that nothing makes us women so buoyant as a dozen ells of velvet trailing at our heels.

Ulric. Well then?

Barb. Well then? King Mathias cannot fail to receive you well, nor you to make your fortune at his court. I advise you to go there. If I cannot follow you—well! as I gave you my hand a moment ago to ask you for the secret of your heart, so, Ulric, again I give it you, and I swear that I will be faithful to you.

Ulric. Here is mine.

Barb. It is only one who loves that can know how much he is loved. Bid them saddle your horse. Go by yourself, and as often as you doubt your wife, think that your wife is sitting at your door, that she is watching the road, and is not doubting you. Come, my friend Ludwig is waiting for us.

SCENE IV.

The Chevalier. Rosemberg.

Ros. I know nothing pleasanter after a good breakfast than witty company in the open air and a free discussion on women in the proper tone.

Chev. You have an introduction to the Queen?

Ros. Yes, I hope for a good reception.

(They sit down.)

Chev. Do not doubt of success and you will have it. During the last war we waged against the Turks under the Voivode of Transylvania, one evening, in a deep forest, I met a girl who had lost her way.

Ros. What was the name of the forest?

Chev. It was a certain forest on the banks of the Caspian Sea.

Ros. I don't know it, even in books.

Chev. This poor girl was attacked by three brigands, cased in steel from head to foot, and mounted on excellent horses.

Ros. How your words interest me! I am all ears.

Chev. I sprang to the ground, and drawing my sword, I ordered them to retire. Excuse me the recital of my own praises; you will understand I was forced to kill them all three. After one of the bloodiest combats——

Ros. Did you receive any wounds?

Chev. One of them merely missed, by a hair's-breadth, impaling me with his lance; but having avoided it, I discharged on his head so violent a blow that he fell stark

dead. Immediately approaching the girl, I recognised in her a princess, whose name it is impossible for me to reveal.

Ros. I understand your reasons, and will take care not to press you for it. Discretion is a law for every man who knows the world.

Chev. The favours with which she distinguished me must remain equally secret. I brought her home and she granted me an assignation for the next day; but the king, her father, having promised her in marriage to the Bashaw of Caramania, it was extremely difficult for us to meet in secret. Independently of sixty eunuchs, who watched over her day and night, she had been entrusted since her infancy to a giant named Moloch.

Ros. Waiter, bring me a glass of Tokay.

Chev. You can imagine what the enterprise was! To penetrate into an unapproachable castle built on a wave-lashed rock and surrounded by such a guard! Here, my Lord Rosemberg, was the scheme I conceived. Lend me your attention, I beg.

Ros. Holy Virgin! my brain is all on fire.

Chev. I took a boat and gained the open sea. Then, having precipitated myself into the waves, by means of a certain talisman given me by a Bohemian sorcerer who is one of my friends, I was cast up on the shore in all respects like a drowned man. It was at the hour when the giant Moloch was going his rounds on the ramparts; he found me stretched out upon the sand and carried me into his bed.

Ros. I guess already; it is capital.

Chev. They lavished attendance upon me. As for me, I was only waiting, with my eyes half-closed, for the moment when I should find myself alone with the giant. Immediately throwing myself upon him, I seized him by the right leg and hurled him into the sea.

Ros. I shiver; my heart throbs.

Chev. I admit I ran some risk, for at the noise of his fall the sixty eunuchs ran up, sabre in hand; but I had had the time to throw myself back on the bed and appeared to be sound asleep. Far from conceiving any suspicion, they left me in the room with one of the princess's women to watch by me. Then drawing from my breast a phial and a poniard, I commanded this woman to follow me, in the interval while all the eunuchs were at supper. "Take this potion," said I to her, "and mix it cunningly in their wine, or I poniard you on the spot." She obeyed me without venturing to utter a word, and soon, the draught's action having sent the eunuchs to sleep, I was left master of the castle. I went straight to the women's apartments.

I found them undressed to go to bed; but not wishing to do them any harm, I contented myself with shutting them up in their rooms and taking charge of the keys, which were to the number of six score. Then all difficulties being removed, I went to the princess's room. Scarcely had I reached the threshold, when I bent one knee to the ground. "Queen of my heart," said I to her in a tone of the profoundest respect. But excuse me, Lord Rosemberg, I am forced to stop; modesty makes it imperative.

Ros. No! I see; nothing can resist you. Ah! how I long to be at court! But where am I to find these unknown potions, these mysterious talismans, Sir Chevalier?

Chev. That is difficult; nevertheless I will tell you a thing in confidence. Look, if you have money it is the best talisman to be found.

Ros. Thank heaven! I don't lack for that. My father is the richest nobleman of the country-side. The eve of my departure he gave me a good round sum, and my aunt Beatrix (she was crying) also slipped into my hand a fine purse that she had worked. My horses are in good condition and well-fed, my lackeys well-dressed, and I am not a bad figure myself.

Chev. Capital; it is all that is needed.

Ros. The worst of it is that I know nothing. No, I can learn nothing by heart. My hand shakes at every turn when I am talking to women.

Chev. Come, empty your glass. To succeed in the world, Lord Rosemberg, remember well these three maxims: See is Know; Will is Can; and Dare is Have.

Ros. I must have that in writing. The words seem to me bold and sonorous. Still, I admit I don't quite understand them.

Chev. If you want, first of all, to please the women, and that is the first thing to be done if you would do anything, observe the profoundest respect towards them. Speak of them all (without exception) as neither more nor less than divinities. You may, it is true, if so it please you, say openly to other men that you do not care a fig for these

same women; but only do so in a general manner, and without ever slandering one more than the rest.

When you are seated near a pale blonde (on the end of a sofa), and you see her loll languidly on the cushions, keep at a distance, play with the end of her scarf, and tell her that you have a profound grief. Beside a brunette, if she is lively and merry, try to look like a man of resolution, whisper to her in her ear, and if the tip of your moustache comes near enough to brush her cheek, that is no great harm. But to every woman, as a universal rule, say that she has a pearl enshrined in her heart, and that all ills are nothing, if she lets you press her finger tips. All your ways while about her should be modelled on the polite lackeys, who are covered with gorgeous liveries; in one word, always distinguish scrupulously these two parts of life: the form and the substance—that is the great thing. Thus you will fulfil the first maxim: Seeing is knowing; and you will pass for a man of experience.

Ros. Go on, I beg of you. I feel a new man, and I bless inwardly the chance that brought me acquainted with you at this inn.

Chev. Once you have proved to the women that, with the greatest politeness and an infinite deal of respect, you laugh at them in your sleeve, attack the men. I don't mean by that, that you should make a set at them. On the contrary, never seem to concern yourself either with their sayings or doings. Always be polite, but with an air of indifference. "Make yourself a rarity, and you will be loved," is a Turkish proverb. By this means you will gain

a great advantage. Wherever you go, your silence and your listless way will cause people to stare at you when you pass. See that your dress and your surroundings proclaim an extravagant luxury. Keep folks' eyes always on you. Never let it enter your mind to show any doubt of yourself, for then immediately everybody doubts too. Should you by chance have propounded the merest nonsense in the world, stick to it in the teeth of the very devil ; let yourself be knocked on the head sooner than give in.

Ros. Knocked on the head ?

Chev. Yes, without a doubt. In short, behave exactly as if the sun and the stars were your private property, and the fairy Morgana had held you at the baptismal font. In this way you will fulfil the second maxim : Will is Can ; and you will pass for a person to be feared.

Ros. What a gay life awaits me at court, and what a fine thing it is to be a great lord.

Chev. Once approved by the women and admired by the men, keep a watch on yourself, Lord Rosemberg. If you raise your hand, let your first sword-stroke deal death, as your first glance should inspire love. Life is a terrible pantomime, and gesture has nothing to do with thought or speech. If speech has made you beloved, if thought has made you feared, let the gesture know nothing of it. Be yourself then. Strike like the thunderbolt. Let the world disappear from your eyes ; let the spark of life that you received of God isolate itself, and become itself a God : let your will be the eye of the lynx, the nose of the weasel, the warrior's arrow. Forget while you act that there are on earth

other creatures than you and he with whom you have to do.

So having gracefully elbowed through the crowd that surrounds you, when you have reached the goal and earned success, you can enter the lists again with the same ease and promise yourself fresh successes. It is then that you will reap the fruits of the third maxim: Dare is Have; and that you will be really experienced, formidable, and powerful.

Ros. Ah! good heavens! If I had known that sooner! You make me think of a certain evening when I was sitting with my aunt Beatrix in the rabbit warren. I felt just what you say. It seemed to me that the world was disappearing, and that we were left alone under the sky. So I begged her to go indoors. It was as dark as pitch.

Chev. You seem to me still very young, and you are early in the quest for fortune.

Ros. It is none too early when one's destiny is war. I never saw a Turk in my life; I fancy they must be like wild beasts.

Chev. I am sorry that important business prevents my going to court. I should have been curious to see your first appearance there. Meanwhile, if so it please you, I can make you a valuable present that will singularly assist you.

(Drawing a little book from his pocket.)

Ros. That little book? Why, what is it?

Chev. It is a marvellous work—a collection, concise and yet detailed, of all the stories of love, stratagems, combats,

and expedients suitable to form a young man and advance him in ladies' graces.

Ros. And the name of this precious book?

Chev. "Sentiments' Safeguard." It is a priceless treasure, and among the tales comprised therein you will find a good number of which I am the hero. Yet I must admit to you that I am not its owner; it belongs to one of my friends, and I could not part with it unless you gave me ten sequins.

Ros. Ten sequins is nothing to stick at. (*Giving them.*) Especially after the excellent breakfast to which you so gallantly invited me.

Chev. Nonsense! a fish, merely a fish.

Ros. But it was delicious. Can you believe I shall forget this meeting? It was heaven that brought me on this road. So uncomfortable an inn! damp sheets, and no curtains! I should not have stayed an hour, had not I fallen in with you.

Chev. What would you have? One must learn to put up with anything.

Ros. Oh, certainly. My aunt Beatrix would be very uneasy if she knew me to be in a bad inn. But we men pay no attention to these miserable details. Heaven guard you, dear chevalier. My horses are ready, and I leave you.

Chev. Farewell, till we meet again; don't forget me. If you should have dealings with the Voivode, he is a near relative of mine, and I will remember you.

Ros. Count me for your very humble servant.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.—*The Queen. Ulric. Several Courtiers.**(The court. A garden.)*

The Queen. Welcome, Count Ulric. The king, our spouse, is at this moment detained far from us by a too long and cruel war, which has cost our youth a rich portion of its noble blood. It is a sad pleasure to see them thus ready still to shed yet more of it; but yet a pleasure it is, and a glory too for us. The scions of Bohemia's and of Hungary's foremost houses have filled our hearts with pride and martial spirit by rallying round the throne. Whatever be a warrior's fate, who is it would dare deplore it? Not ourselves, who am queen, Ulric, nor I who was a daughter of Aragon. I knew your father well, and your young face speaks to me of the past. Therefore live here like the son of a cherished memory. We will speak of you this evening to the chancellor: have patience, it is I who will answer for you to him. Under these auspices you will be received by the king. Since our clarions woke you in your castle, and since from the depths of your seclusion you came in quest of our dangers, we

will not let you repent of having been brave and faithful: in pledge of this here is our royal hand.

(Ulric kisses her hand, then withdraws apart. Exit the Queen.)

1st Courtier. There is a man better received at his first sight of our queen than we who are thirty years in attendance.

2nd Courtier. Let us address him and learn who he is.

1st Courtier. Have you not heard? He is the Count Ulric, a Bohemian nobleman. He is seeking his fortune, as a young husband who wants money to pay the piper for his wife to dance to.

2nd Courtier. Do they say his wife is pretty?

1st Courtier. Charming; the pearl of Hungary.

2nd Courtier. What is that other young man tripping past there so hurriedly?

1st Courtier. I don't know him. He is one more new-comer. The king's liberality draws this way all the flies who are in quest of a ray of sunshine.

(Enter Rosemberg.)

2nd Courtier. This one seems to me a gay butterfly, a regular wasp, with his striped doublet. My lord, your servants. What brings you into this garden?

Ros. (aside). I am questioned on every side, and I don't know if I should answer. All these strange faces and these staring eyes that put one out of countenance confuse me desperately! *(Aloud.)* Where is the queen, gentlemen? I am Astolphe de Rosemberg, and I wish to be brought to her presence.

1st Courtier. The queen has just left the palace. If you want to speak to her, wait her passing, and she will return in an hour.

Ros. The devil! that is annoying.

(He sits down on a bench.)

2nd Courtier. You are come for the festivities, no doubt?

Ros. Are there festivities? What luck!—No, gentlemen, I am come to take service in the army.

1st Courtier. Everybody is doing that at present.

Ros. Why, yes! so it seems. Many meddle with it, but few come out of it well.

2nd Courtier. You speak with severity.

Ros. How many country squires do we see here not worth so much as naming, yet who for all that take upon themselves as if they were great captains? To see them, you would say they need only cross their horses to drive the Turk beyond the Caucasus; and yet they come out of some hole in Bohemia like hungry rats.

Ulric (approaching). My lord, I am the Count Ulric, a Bohemian nobleman, and I find a little levity in your words which at your age is pardonable, but which I counsel you to retrench. To be flippant is as great a blemish as to be poor, let me tell you, and let this lesson profit you.

Ros. (aside). It is my Bohemian of the inn. *(Aloud.)* To express oneself in general terms is no offence to any one. As for the matter of the lesson, I have given them sometimes, but never took one yet.

Ulric. These are big words;—and where, pray, do you come from yourself, to be entitled to use them?

1st Courtier. Come, my lords, do not let a few words dropped without intention make a ground of quarrel. We think it our duty to intervene; reflect that you are in the queen's precincts. This word alone is enough.

Ulric. That is true, and I thank you for your timely warning. I should think myself unworthy of the name I bear did I not yield to so just a remonstrance.

Ros. Let it be as you please; I have nothing to say to this.

(Exeunt Courtiers. Ulric and Rosemberg remain seated on opposite sides.)

Ros. (aside). The Chevalier Uladislas advised me always to stick to a thing once uttered. Since I have been at this court that worthy man's words are never out of my head. I don't know what is going on in me; I feel as if I had a lion's heart. If I am not greatly mistaken I shall make my fortune.

Ulric (aside). How kindly the queen received me! and yet I experience a sadness that nothing can overcome. What is Barberine doing now? Alas! alas! Ambition! Was I not happy in that old castle? Poor, doubtless, but what then? O madness! dreamers that we are!

Ros. (aside). It is above all that book I bought which turns my brains upside down. If I open it on going to bed I cannot sleep all night. What surprising tales, what admirable stories! One hews a whole army to pieces; another jumps from the top of a belfry into the Caspian

Sea without injuring himself ; and to think that it is all true—all has happened ! One especially dazzles me. (*Getting up and reading aloud.*) “When the Sultan Bobadil”—Ah ! there is some one listening ; it is that Bohemian nobleman. I must make my peace with him. When I picked a quarrel with him I forgot he had a pretty wife. (*To Ulric.*) You come from Bohemia, my lord ? You must know my uncle, the Baron d’Engelbrecht ?

Ulric. Very well ; he is one of my neighbours. We hunted together last year. He is connected (distantly, it is true) with my wife’s family.

Ros. You are a connection of my uncle d’Engelbrecht ! Pray let us be acquainted. Is it long since you left home ?

Ulric. I have only been a day here.

Ros. You seem to say that regretfully. Can you have any reason to look back with sadness ? No doubt it is always vexatious to leave one’s family, above all when one is married. Your wife is young, since you are, and therefore handsome. There is matter for uneasiness.

Ulric. Uneasiness is not what galls me. My wife is fair ; but a July sun is not purer in its cloudless sky than the noble heart in her dear breast.

Ros. That is saying a great deal. Save God, who can know a woman’s heart ? I avow that in your place I should not be at ease.

Ulric. And why, so please you ?

Ros. Because I should suspect my wife, unless she were virtue itself.

Ulric. I believe mine to be.

Ros. So you own a phoenix. Is the privilege of our good King Mathias' granting that distinguishes you among all husbands?

Ulric. It is not the king who granted me this favour, but God, who is somewhat more than a king.

Ros. I have not a doubt you are right; but you know what the philosophers say, with the Latin poet. What lighter than a feather?—dust. Lighter than dust?—wind. Lighter than wind?—woman. Lighter than woman?—nothing.

Ulric. I am a warrior, not a philosopher, and I do not trouble my head for the poets. All I know is that in point of fact my wife is young, straight, and finely made; that there is neither needlework nor handiwork that she does not understand better than any one else; that you could not find in the whole kingdom a squire or a major-domo who can wait at a lord's table with a better grace than she. Add to this that she is as skilful as fearless on horseback or hawking, and at the same time can keep her accounts in as good order as any tradesman. There you have her, my lord; and with all that I would not suspect her should I go ten years without sight of her.

Ros. This is a surprising portrait.

(*Enter Polacco.*)

Pol. I kiss your lordships' hands. Good day, my lords. Youth is the mother of health. Ho! ho! Thank God for the pleasant faces! Our lady shield you!

Ros. What's the matter, friend? Whom is your business with?

Pol. I kiss your lordships' hands, and offer you my services—my little services—for the love of God.

Ulric. Why, are you a beggar? I did not look to meet one in these alleys.

Pol. A beggar! God help us! A beggar? I am no beggar. I am an honourable man. My name is Polacco. Polacco is not a beggar. By St. Matthew! beggar is not a word to be applied to Polacco!

Ulric. Explain yourself, and do not be annoyed if I ask what you are.

Pol. Ho, ho! No offence; there is none. Our young gentleman will tell you. Who does not know Polacco?

Ulric. I, since I am a new-comer, and know no one.

Pol. Good, good; you will come to it like the rest. One is useful in one's time and place—each in his little sphere. Folk must not be despised.

Ulric. What esteem or contempt can I feel for you if you will not tell me what you are?

Pol. Hush! Silence! The moon rises: there was a cock that crowed.

Ulric. What mysterious idiocy is this gabble a prelude to? You talk like delirium incarnate.

Pol. A mirror, a little mirror. God is God, and the saints are blessed. Here is a little mirror for sale.

Ulric. A pretty purchase; no bigger than my hand, and stitched into leather. It is a Bohemian wizard's glass; they wear the like of it on their breasts.

Ros. Look in it. What do you see?

Ulric. Nothing, on my word; not so much as the tip of

my nose. It is a magic glass ; it is covered with a myriad of cabalistic signs.

Pol. Live and learn ; learn and live !

Ulric. Oh, ho ! I understand what you are. Yes, an honest wizard, by my soul ! Well, what does one see in your glass ?

Pol. Learn and live ; live and learn.

Ulric. Really ! Then I think I understand again. If I am not mistaken, this mirror should show the absent. I have seen sometimes some that were given out to be such. Several of my friends carry them in the army.

Ros. By Jupiter, my lord Ulric, here is an offer that comes pat. You were talking of your wife. This mirror is the very thing for you. And tell me, honest Polacco, can one only see people in it ? Can one not see what they are doing at the same time.

Pol. White is white ; yellow is gold. Gold is the devil's ; white is God's.

Ulric. Withdraw, my good friend ; neither his lordship nor I need your services. He is single, and I am not superstitious.

Ros. No, on my life. Lord Ulric, since you are my kinsman, I will do this for you. I will buy this mirror myself, and we will look in this minute to see if your wife chats with her neighbour.

Ulric. Withdraw, old sir, I beg of you.

Ros. No, no ! He shall not go without our trying this test. How much for your mirror, Polacco ?

(Ulric moves away, and walks up and down.)

Pol. Ho, ho ! Every dog his day, my dear lord. All comes to hand, each dog his day.

Ros. I ask—your price ?

Pol. Refuse and muse ; muse and refuse.

Ros. I don't muse ; I want to buy your glass.

Pol. Ho, ho ! Who loses time, time catches ; who loses time——

Ros. I understand you. Stay, here is my purse. You are afraid, no doubt, that you should be seen plying your little calling here in public.

Pol. (*taking the purse*). Well said, well said, my dear lord. The walls have eyes, and the trees too. God save the police ; the police are gentlemen.

Ros. Now you are to explain us the magical effects of this little glass.

Pol. My lord, on fixing your eyes attentively on this mirror, you will see a little mist, which little by little clears away. If the attention be redoubled, a vague and undefined form soon begins to come out. Attention again redoubled, the form becomes clear. It shows you the portrait of the absent person of whom you thought on taking the glass. If that person is a woman, and she be faithful to you, the face is white and almost pale. She smiles on you faintly. If the person is only tempted, the face is tinted with a blond yellow, like the gold of a ripe wheat ear. If she is unfaithful, it becomes coal black, and immediately a foul smell makes itself perceived.

Ros. A foul smell, you say ?

Pol. Yes, as when water is thrown on lighted coals.

Ros. It is well. Now take what you want from that purse, and give me back the rest.

Pol. Who comes shall know; who knows shall come.

Ros. Do you sell this toy so dear?

Pol. Who comes shall see; who sees shall come.

Ros. The devil take you and your proverbs!

Pol. I kiss hands, hands—— Who comes shall see——

(Exit.)

Ros. Now, Lord Ulric, if you are agreeable, it is easy for us to know whether you or I be in the right.

Ulric. I already answered you: I cannot stand these juggleries.

Ros. Bah! You heard as I did that worthy sorcerer's explanation. What does it cost you to put it to the proof? Cast your eye on the mirror, I beg.

Ulric. Look in it yourself, if so it please you.

Ros. Yes, by my word; failing you, it is I that am really to look in it, and think for you of your dear countess, were it only to see appear her charming phantom—white or yellow. Stay, I see her already!

Ulric. Once for all, sir knight, do not continue in this tone. This is my advice to you.

SCENE II.

The same. Several Courtiers.

1st Courtier (to Ulric). Count Ulric, the queen is returning directly to the palace. She has ordered us to tell you that your presence will be needed there.

Ulric. A thousand thanks, gentlemen ; and I am wholly at her majesty's orders.

Ros. (still looking in the mirror). Tell me, gentlemen, do you not smell some singular odour ?

1st Courtier. What kind of odour ?

Ros. Ha ! Like quenched coal.

Ulric (to Rosemberg). Have you sworn to wear out my patience, then ?

Ros. Look yourself, Count Ulric ; assuredly that is no white.

Ulric. Boy, you insult a woman you do not know.

Ros. That is perhaps because I know others.

Ulric. Well, then, since mirrors please you, look at yourself in this one. *(He draws his sword.)*

Ros. Wait ; I am not on guard !

(Draws his sword also.)

SCENE III.

The same. The Queen. All the Court.

The Queen. What does this mean, young gentlemen ? I did not think it was to water my parterre that Hungarian swords left the scabbard. What is the ground of this quarrel ?

Ulric. Madam, pardon me. There are insults I cannot endure. It is not I that am offended, it is my honour.

The Queen. What is the question ? Speak !

Ulric. Madam, I left a wife, as fair as virtue's self, shut up in my castle. This young man, whom I do not know,

and who does not know my wife, has none the less aimed at her raillery on which he prides himself. I protest at your feet that this very day I refused to draw my sword from respect to the place where I stand.

The Queen (to Ros.). You seem very young, my child. What motive can have led you to slander a woman who is unknown to you?

Ros. Madam, I did not slander a woman. I expressed my opinion of all women in general, and it is not my fault if I cannot change it.

The Queen. By my word, I did not think experience wore so fair a beard.

Ros. Madam, it is just and easily believed that your majesty should defend the virtue of women. I cannot have the same reasons as your majesty to do so.

The Queen. That is a rash answer. Each indeed may have on this subject what opinion he will; but what think you, gentlemen? Is there not a presumptuous and arrogant folly in the pretension to judge all women? It is a wide plea to uphold, and were I the opposing advocate—I, your grey-haired queen,—I could cast into the balance some words that you do not know. Why, who has taught a boy like you to despise your nurse? You are fresh from school, it seems; is this what you read in the blue eyes of the girls who drew water at your village fountain? Is it so then? The first word you spelt out on the trembling leaves of a celestial legend was disdain? You, at your age, feel it? I am younger than you then, for you make my heart beat. Stay, lay your hand on Count

Ulric's : I know his wife no more than you do, but I am a woman, and I see how his sword quivers still in his hand. I wager you my wedding-ring that his wife is as faithful to him as the Virgin to God !

Ulric. Queen, I take up the wager, and stake on it all I possess on earth, if this young man choose to accept it.

Ros. I am three times as rich as you.

The Queen. What is your name ?

Ros. Astolphe de Rosemberg.

The Queen. What, you are a Rosemberg ? I know your father ; he spoke to me of you. Come, come, Count Ulric wagers nothing against you ; we will send you back to school.

Ros. No, your majesty. It shall not be said that I held back, if the Count take up the wager.

The Queen. And what is your wager ?

Ros. If he will give me his knightly word that he will write to his wife nothing of what has passed between us, I lay my fortune against his—at least up to an equal stake—that I will take my way to-morrow to the castle he inhabits, and that this heart of diamond on which he counts so surely will not resist me long.

Ulric. I take you, and it is too late to unsay your words. You have wagered before the queen, and since her august presence obliged me to lower my sword's point, it is she I will take for second in this honourable duel I propose.

Ros. I accept, and nothing shall make me unsay it ; but I must have a letter of introduction to procure me a freer approach.

Ulric. With all my heart—what you please.

The Queen. I hold myself then as your witness, and as judge of the quarrel. The wager shall be recorded by the king's, my master's, chancellor of justice, and to your words I add mine : that no power in earth shall bend me when the day is over. Go, gentlemen ; God protect you !

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.—*Rosemberg. Kalekairi.*

(A room in Barberine's castle. Several vast windows in an inner court open at the back. Through one of these windows is seen a cell in an old Gothic tower, its window also open.)

Ros. So, my pretty child, you were saying that your name was Kalekairi?

Kal. It was my father's choice.

Ros. Very good. And your mistress is not to be seen?

Kal. She is dressing. She has been dressing a long time. She said she was to be told.

Ros. Don't be in a hurry, Kalekairi. If I am not mistaken, that is a Turkish or Arabian name at least.

Kal. Kalekairi came into the world at Trebizond, but she was not born for the mean place she fills.

Ros. Are you discontented with your lot? Have you to complain of your mistress?

Kal. No one complains of her.

Ros. Tell me frankly.

Kal. What do you call frankly?

Ros. Saying what one thinks.

Kal. When Kalekairi thinks of nothing she says nothing.

Ros. Quite right. (*Aside.*) Here is a little savage who doesn't look too forbidding. (*Aloud.*) So you like your mistress then?

Kal. Everybody likes her.

Ros. They say she is very pretty.

Kal. They are right.

Ros. She is a coquette, I fancy, since she is so long over her toilette.

Kal. No, she is kind.

Ros. Then why did you complain of living in this castle?

Kal. Because my mother's daughter ought to have many attendants, instead of being one herself.

Ros. I understand. Some reverse of fortune.

Kal. The pirates carried me off.

Ros. The pirates! Tell me the story.

Kal. It is not a story. It makes one cry. Kalekairi never speaks of it.

Ros. Really?

Kal. No, not even to my parrot, not even to my dog Mamouth, not even to the rose-tree that is in my room.

Ros. You are discreet, I see.

Kal. One must be.

Ros. That is my opinion. Did you serve your apprenticeship here?

Kal. No, I went to Constantinople, to Smyrna, and to the Pasha's house at Janina.

Ros. Oho! Young as you are, you must have some experience of the world.

Kal. I always waited upon women.

Ros. There is no better school. So look now, pretty Kalekairi, if your mistress receives me well, I look forward to spending some time here. If I needed your good offices, would you be disposed to oblige me?

Kal. With much pleasure.

Ros. Well answered. Stay; as a Turk, you ought to like the colour of sequins. Take this purse, and go and announce me.

Kal. Why do you give me this?

Ros. To make acquaintance. Go and announce me, my dear child.

Kal. There was no need for the sequins.

SCENE II.

Rosemberg alone. Then Barberine, in the turret.

Ros. There is an odd waiting-maid. What a singular idea it is for this Count Ulric to have his wife guarded by a sort of she-Mameluke! It cannot be denied that whatever happens to me has something so fantastic about it that it seems almost supernatural. . . . Come, anyhow I have made a good beginning. The attendant is enlisted on my side. As for the mistress, let me see. What means shall I employ there? Stratagem, force, or love? Force! Shame upon it! It would neither be the part of a man of honour nor fair on the wager. As for love, that might be tried; but then that is a long business, and I want to conquer like

Cæsar. Ah! I see some one in that turret. It is the Countess herself; I recognise her. She is doing her hair. I even think that she is singing.

Barb. (singing).

Gay cavalier, that ridest to the fray,

Whither away

So far from here?

Seest not how night with darkling fears is rife,

And that our life

Is but a tear.

Ros. She does not sing badly, but it seems to me that her song expresses a regret. Yes, something like a memory. Hum! When I took this bet, I think I acted very hastily. There are moments when one can't answer for oneself. It is like a puff of wind catching in your cloak. Plague on it! There must be no mistake about the matter. I have a round sum on it. Let me see. Shall I use stratagem?

Barb. (2nd stanza).

Say you, you credit that a love forsaken,

From the heart shaken,

Spreads wing to fly?

Ah, well-a-day! ye seekers after fame,

Even your flame

Leaps but to die.

Ros. This song has still the same burden, but what does a song go for? Yes, the more I think of it, the more stratagem seems to me the real way to succeed. Stratagem and love together would work wonders; but the truth is, I don't know much of strategy. If I were to do like that

Uladislas, when he tricked the giant Moloch; but here is the fault of all these stories. They are charming to listen to, and one doesn't know how to put them in practice. Yesterday, for instance, I was reading the story of a hero of romance, who, in my situation, hid himself for a whole day to get into his mistress's room. Can I hide myself in a chest? I should come out covered with dust, and my clothes would be spoilt. Bah! I think I have done the right thing. Yes, the best of all stratagems is to give money to the waiting-maid. I will dazzle all the other servants in the same way. Ah, here comes Barberine. Well then, all is settled; I will employ strategy and love together.

SCENE III.

Rosemberg. Barberine. Kalekairi.

Kal. (she stays in the background). Here is the mistress.

Barb. My lord, you are welcome. You come from the court, I am told. How is my husband? What is he doing? Where is he? At the wars? Alas, answer me.

Ros. He is at the wars, madam—at least I think so. As for what he is doing, it seems easy to tell; to look at you is to be certain. Who can have seen you and forget you? He is thinking of you, Countess, no doubt; and far though he be from you, his fate merits envy rather than pity if you on your part are thinking of him. Here is a letter he entrusted to me.

Barb. (reading). "He is a young knight of the greatest merit, and belongs to one of the noblest families of the two

kingdoms. Receive him as a friend." I will read you no more; we are rich only in goodwill, but we will do our best to temper the poverty of your reception.

Ros. I left my horses and my grooms somewhere over there. In view of my birth and my fortune, I cannot travel without a considerable following. But I do not want to inconvenience you with this train.

Barb. Pardon me, my husband would be vexed with me if I did not insist upon it. We will send and tell them to come here.

Ros. What thanks can I offer for so favourable a reception? That white hand deigned to signal from the top of these turrets for the gate to be opened to me, and these bright eyes do not contradict it, noble Countess. They open to me also the gate of an hospitable heart. Give me your leave to go myself and give directions to my suite, and I will return to you; I have a few orders to give. (*Aside.*) Courage, and a full pocket. I want to take the air of the neighbourhood a little.

SCENE IV.

Barberine. Kalekairi.

Barb. What do you think of this young man, my dear?

Kal. Kalekairi does not like him at all.

Barb. He displeases you! Why so? It seems to me he is not bad-looking.

(*Sitting down.*)

Kal. Certainly!

Barb. What is it that shocks you then? He does not express himself ill—a little courtier-like; but that is the fault of his youth, and he brings good news.

Kal. I don't think so.

Barb. What, you don't believe it! Here is my husband's letter full of tenderness for me and friendship for his ambassador.

(Kalekairi shakes her head.)

Why, what has this Monsieur de Rosemberg done to you?

Kal. He has given gold to Kalekairi.

Barb. (laughing). Is that what has offended you? Well, you have only to give it back!

Kal. I am a slave.

Barb. Not here. You are my companion and my friend.

Kal. If the gold were given back he would distrust.

Barb. What do you mean? Explain yourself. You treat him as a conspirator.

Kal. Kalekairi had done nothing for him; she had not opened the door; she had not settled a room; she had not even prepared a meal. He wanted to deceive Kalekairi.

Barb. But Kalekairi is very quick to take offence. Did he try to make love to you?

Kal. Oh, no!

Barb. Well then, what is there so surprising? He is a new-comer at the chateau. Is it not natural enough he should seek to gain some goodwill here? Besides, he is rich, as it seems, and rather pleased it should be known; it is a grand seigneur's little way.

Kal. He does not know Count Ulric.

Barb. What, does not know him?

Kal. No. He spoke to L'Uscoque the porter, and asked him if he liked his master. He asked me, too, if I liked you. He does not know us.

Barb. What a crazy girl! So these are the fine proofs that cause you suspicions about him! And what great crime do you think he is plotting, pray?

Kal. When I was at Janina a Christian came who loved my mistress. He too gave much gold to the slaves, and he was cut into pieces.

Barb. Pity on us, how you go to work! Look at this little lioness! And you imagine apparently that this young man is come to try and make a conquest of me? Is not that at the bottom of your thoughts?

(Kalekairi signs in the affirmative.)

Well then, my dear, be free from anxiety. You may drop your fright and your little methods, which are a trifle too Asiatic. I do not fancy that a stranger will come and speak to me of love at the first encounter. But suppose it to be so, you may rest assured—— Here is our guest; you will leave us alone. Let us step aside a little. *(Aside.)* None the less, it would be droll if she were right.

(They retire to the back of the stage.)

SCENE V.

The same. Rosemberg.

Ros. (thinking himself alone). I think that my plan is settled now. In Uladislas's little book there is the history

of a certain lachimo who lays a wager exactly like mine with Leonatus Postumus, son-in-law to the King of Great Britain. This lachimo secretly introduces himself into the fair Imogen's chamber in her absence, and takes down on his tablet an exact description of the chamber—here such and such a door, there a window so, the staircase runs thus. He notes the pettiest details, just as if he were a general making his preparations for a campaign. I will imitate this lachimo.

Barb. (aside). He looks as if he were thinking over something.

Kal. (also aside). Don't doubt it. Perhaps he is a Turkish spy.

Ros. L'Uscoque, the porter, took my money. I will slip by stealth into Barberine's room, and there—— Yes, what shall I do if I fall in with her there? Hum! it is embarrassing and dangerous.

Kal. Do you see how he ponders?

Ros. Well! I will plead my cause, for heaven keep me from offending her; it would be dishonour to myself. But in all novels, and even in ballads, what do the most perfect lovers do but gain an entrance thus to the lady of their thoughts, when they can. It is always more convenient, and one is less interrupted.—Ah, there is the fair Countess. Suppose I tried first of all some phrases of gallantry, just in a casual way? Let us see what she has to say on this text; that can do no harm, for after all, if I were lucky enough to win her favour, that would dispense with strategy; and it is that stratagem which perplexes me.

(*Aloud.*) Pardon me, Countess, for so long an absence from you ; my train is considerable, and one must get things in some order.

Barb. Nothing truer ; and I beg you will be good enough to consider yourself perfectly free in this house. You understand that a friend of my husband's cannot be a stranger for us. (*To Kalekairi.*) Go, Kalekairi ; go, my dear, and don't be afraid.

(*Exit Kalekairi.*)

Ros. You fill me with gratitude. To tell you the truth, I only feared in coming to your house that I might be troublesome ; and I should run a great risk of becoming so were I to let my heart speak.

Barb. (*aside.*) His heart speak ! What language ! (*Aloud.*) Rest assured, Lord Rosemberg, that you do not inconvenience me at all, for the liberty I offer you is very necessary for myself, and I grant it you to avail myself of the same.

Ros. That is understood. I know the claims of society, and I am aware of the duties your rank brings with it. A chatelaine is queen in her own house, and you, madam, are twice queen, by descent and beauty.

Barb. That is not it. The fact is that we are at present busy with the vintage.

Ros. Yes, indeed, as I passed I saw troops of peasants on these hills. It is a sort of festival, and you no doubt receive on this occasion the homage of your vassals. They must be happy, since they belong to you.

Barb. Yes, but they are a great worry. I have to

spend all day in the fields to get in the maize and the late hay.

Ros. (aside). If she answers me in this strain, the talk will not be very poetic.

Barb. (aside). If he persists in his compliments it may be amusing.

Ros. Countess, I avow that one thing surprises me. It is not to see a noble lady watch over the care of her domains, but I should have thought she would have watched from a greater distance.

Barb. I understand. You are from the court, and the beauties of Albe Royale do not take their gilt shoes for walks in the grass.

Ros. That is true, madam; and do you not think that this life, all made up of pleasures, festivities, enchantments, and magnificence, is an admirable thing indeed? Without wishing to slander the rustic virtues, is not a pretty woman's right place there in that brilliant sphere. Look in your glass, Countess. Is not a pretty woman creation's masterpiece, and are not all the world's riches made to surround her, and, were it possible, to embellish her.

Barb. Yes, no doubt that can give pleasure. Your fine ladies only see this poor world from their palfrey's back, or if their foot rest on earth there is a cloth of velvet underneath it.

Ros. Oh, not always! My aunt Beatrix goes into the fields like you too.

Barb. Ah! your aunt is a good housekeeper.

Ros. Yes, and very stingy except to me, for she would give me the cap off her head.

Barb. Really?

Ros. Oh, certainly; nearly all the jewels I wear come from her.

Barb. (*aside*). There is not much harm in this boy. (*Aloud.*) I like good housekeepers greatly, seeing that I myself set up to be one. There, you see the proof of it.

Ros. What is that? God forgive me, a spindle and distaff.

Barb. These are my weapons.

Ros. Is it possible? What! you practise this old trade of our grandmothers? You plunge these beautiful hands into this wisp of tow?

Barb. I try to give them as little rest as may be. Does not your aunt spin?

Ros. But my aunt is old, madam; it is only old women that spin.

Barb. Indeed! are you quite sure of that? I don't believe it should be so. Do you not know this old maxim that work is a prayer? That was said long ago. Well! if the two things are alike, and to God's eyes they may be, is it not just that the harder task should be the lot of the young? Is it not when our hands are gay and brisk and full of activity that they should turn the spindle? And when age and fatigue one day force them to stop, is not then the time for them to be clasped in prayer, leaving the rest to the Supreme Goodness? Believe me, Lord Rosemberg, never speak evil of our

distaffs, nor even of our needles ; I repeat, these are our weapons. It is true that you men wear more glorious arms, but these have their worth too ; here is my lance and my sword.

(Showing the spindle and distaff.)

Ros. (aside). The sermon is not badly turned, but I am still far from my wager. Let us make one attempt to get back to it. *(Aloud.)* What is said so well, madam, cannot be gainsaid. But weapon for weapon, you will allow me to prefer ours.

Barb. You love combats then, I see ?

Ros. Can you ask it of a nobleman ? Save war and love, what business has he in the world ?

Barb. You have begun early. Do explain one thing for me. I have never been able to understand how a man covered with iron can manage with ease a horse that is also caparisoned in steel from head to foot. That noise of old iron must be deafening, and you must feel as if you were in a prison.

Ros. (aside). I think she is trying to put me to the rout. *(Aloud.)* A good knight fears nothing if he wears his lady's colours.

Barb. You are brave, it seems. Are you very much in love with your aunt ?

Ros. With all my heart, in the way of friendship, of course ; for as to love, that is another thing.

Barb. One does not feel love for one's aunt ?

Ros. I could not feel it for any one at all, with the exception of one single person.

Barb. You have lost your heart.

Ros. Yes, madam, not long ago, but for all my life.

Barb. For a certainty it is some girl you mean to marry.

Ros. Alas, madam, it is impossible. She is young and beautiful, it is true, and she has all the qualities that can make the happiness of a husband; but this happiness is not in store for me—her hand is another's.

Barb. That is annoying—you must get well of it.

Ros. Alas, madam, I must die of it.

Barb. Bah! at your age!

Ros. What! at my age! Are you so much older than I am then?

Barb. Much. I am reasonable.

Ros. I was too till I saw her. Ah, if you knew who she was! If I dared to pronounce her name before——

Barb. Do I know her?

Ros. Yes, madam. And since my secret has half escaped me, I would entrust it to you completely if you promised not to punish me for it.

Barb. Punish you! On what account? I have nothing to say to it, I presume.

Ros. More than you think, madam; and if I dared——

SCENE VI.

The same. Kalekairi.

Ros. (aside). Plague on the little savage! It had cost me such trouble to get so far——

Kal. L'Uscoque the porter came to tell me that there were a great many carts on the road.

Barb. What is it?

Kal. It is for your ear only.

Barb. Come nearer.

Ros. (aside). What a mystery! Vegetables again! This is a dreadfully middle-class chatelaine.

Kal. (whispering to her mistress). There are not any carts at all. Rosenberg has given L'Uscoque the porter a great deal of gold again.

Barb. (in a whisper). Why? and on what pretext?

Kal. (also whispering). He asked to be secretly brought into the mistress's room.

Barb. (in a whisper). My room, do you say? Are you sure?

Kal. (also whispering). L'Uscoque did not want to say anything, but Kalekairi made him drunk, and he told her all.

Barb. (looking at Rosenberg). Indeed, this is incredible!

Ros. (aside). Why, what a curious look she is casting on me!

Barb. (still looking). Is it possible? This young man, a trifle braggadocio it is true, but at bottom of a gentle nature enough, and seemingly—— This is very strange.

Kal. (in a whisper). L'Uscoque says now, that if the mistress chooses, he will hide behind the gate with Ludwig the gardener. They will take a pitchfork apiece, and when he comes——

Barb. (laughing). No, thank you. You always come back to your expeditious method,

Kal. Rosemberg has many armed servants.

Barb. Yes, and we are lone women, or almost lone, in this house in the depths of a little desert. But I will tell you a very simple thing. There is a guardian, my dear, which defends a woman's honour better than all a seraglio's ramparts or all a sultan's mutes, and that guardian is herself. Go, and yet don't be far off. Listen! When I sign to you through this window——

(She whispers in her ear.)

Kal. It shall be done.

(Exit.)

SCENE VII.

Barberine. Rosemberg.

Barb. Well, my lord, what are you thinking of?

Ros. I was waiting to learn if I was to withdraw.

Barb. Were you not just going to make me a confidence. That little girl came in at the wrong moment.

Ros. Oh, yes.

Barb. Well then, go on.

Ros. I no longer have the courage, madam. I don't know how I dared——

Barb. And you dare no longer. You were telling me, I think, that you felt love for a woman who is married to one of your friends.

Ros. One of my friends. I did not say that.

Barb. I thought I heard you. But are you sure I understood you wrongly?

Ros. (aside). What does she mean? Those terrible eyes of hers seem to me singularly soft at present.

Barb. Well! you don't reply?

Ros. Ah, madam! If you have penetrated my thoughts——

Barb. Is that a reason not to utter them?

Ros. No, I see—you have guessed my secret. Those bright eyes have read in my heart, which betrayed me in spite of myself. I can no longer hide from you a feeling stronger than my reason, overpowering even my respect for you. Learn then, Countess, at once my pain and my folly. Since the first day I saw you I have wandered round this castle among these desert mountains! The army, the court, are no longer anything for me! I left all the moment I could find a pretext to bring me into your presence, were it only for an instant. I love you, adore you! That is my secret, madam. Was I wrong to entreat you not to punish me for it?

(He falls on one knee.)

Barb. (aside). For his age he does not lie badly. *(Aloud.)* You felt, you say, the fear of being punished; had you no fear of offending me?

Ros. (rising). In what respect can love be an offence? Against whom is it an offence to love?

Barb. Against God, who forbids it.

Ros. No, Barberine! Since God made beauty, how can he have forbidden us to love it? It is his most perfect image.

Barb. But if beauty is God's image, is not the holy faith sworn at his altar a possession far more precious? Did

he content himself with creating? and has he not extended, father-like, his hand over his celestial work to defend and protect?

Ros. No. When I am thus at your side, when my hand trembles at the touch of yours, when your eyes rest on me with that bewildering glance—no, Barberine, it is impossible; no, God does not forbid love. Alas! no reproaches. I——

Barb. That you should think me pretty, and tell me so, does not displease me greatly. But what use in saying more? Count Ulric is your friend.

Ros. What do I know? What can I answer? What can I remember at your side?

Barb. What! if I consented to listen to you, neither friendship, nor the fear of God, nor the trust of an honourable man who sends you to me, nor any consideration, can make you hesitate?

Ros. No, on my soul; nothing in the world. You are so beautiful, Barberine! Your eyes are so soft, your smile is happiness itself.

Barb. I told you all that does not displease me. But why take my hand like this? O heavens! it seems to me that, were I a man, I would die rather than speak of love to a friend's wife.

Ros. And I, for my part, would rather die than cease to speak of love to you.

Barb. Truly! On your honour, is that your mind?

(She makes a sign out of window.)

Ros. On my soul, on my honour.

Barb. You would betray a friend with a light heart.

(A bell is heard ring.)

There is the bell that tells me to go downstairs.

Ros. O heavens! you leave me thus?

Barb. What am I to say to you? Here is Kalekairi.

SCENE VIII.

The same. Kalekairi.

Ros. This Croat, this Transylvanian again.

Kal. The farmers say they are waiting.

Barb. I am coming.

Ros. (whispering Barberine). What? without a word?
without a look to tell me my fate?

Barb. I think you are a great enchanter, for it is impossible to cherish a spite against you. My farmers are going to sit down to table: wait for me a moment. I made my escape from them, and I return. Come, Kalekairi, come.

Kal. Kalekairi does not want dinner.

Ros. (aside). She wants to stay, the little Ethiopian!
(Aloud.) What, mademoiselle, you are not hungry?

Kal. No, I don't want to. They have stuck a bell up at the top of a great tower; when that machine rings Kalekairi must eat. But Kalekairi does not want to eat: Kalekairi has no appetite.

Barb. (beseechingly). Come, child, you shall do as you wish, but I want you. *(Aside.)* I believe really that she would be capable of keeping an eye on me myself.

SCENE IX.

Rosemberg solus.

Ros. She will return. She tells me to await her, while she goes to send her household out of the way. Can she convey to me more clearly that I have found favour with her? What do I say? Is it not an avowal that she loves me? Is it not the most delightful assignation? Parbleu! I was a great simpleton to rack my brains and spend my money to imitate that ass of an Iachimo. It is much need indeed to go and hide oneself when one has only to appear and conquer. It is true I had no reasonable expectation of so quickly winning a hearing. O Fortune, what munificence! No, I never expected it. That proud countess—that rich stake—all won in so short a time. How well that dear Uladislas knew! So I am to hear her speak to me of love, for it will be her turn now—she, Barberine, oh beauty, oh ineffable joy! I cannot rest, yet I need a little patience. (*Sits down.*) Really, this frailty of women is a great misfortune. Won so soon! Do I love her? No, I don't love her. For shame! To betray like this a husband so upright and so truthful, to yield to a stranger's first amorous glance. What can you do with such a creature? Stay here indeed! I have other fish to fry. Who will resist me now? Already I see myself arriving at the Court, and crossing the long galleries with a careless step. The courtiers make way in silence, the women whisper. The rich stake lies on the

table, and the Queen has a smile on her lips. Rosemberg, what a haul! Yet, what a thing is luck! When I think of what is happening to me, it seems a dream.—No, there is nothing like boldness.—I think I hear a noise.—Some one is coming up the stairs. Nearer and nearer, coming stealthily up. Ah, how my heart beats!

(The windows close, and the noise of several bolts is heard outside.)

What does this mean? I am locked in. The door is being bolted outside. No doubt it is some precaution of Barberine's. She is afraid that some servant might come in here during dinner. She will have sent her waiting-maid to shut the door upon me, until she can make her escape. If she did not come! If some unforeseen obstacle appeared! Well, she would let me know—— But who is walking like that in the corridor? Some one is coming here. It is Barberine, I recognise her step. Silence. We mustn't look the schoolboy here. I want to command my face. He to whom such things happen ought not to show surprise at them——

(A wicket opens in the wall.)

Barb. (outside, speaking through the wicket). My Lord Rosemberg, as you are only come here to commit a theft, the most odious theft, and the most deserving of chastisement, the theft of a woman's honour, and as it is just that the punishment should be proportioned to the crime, you are imprisoned here as a thief. No harm shall be done to you, and your retainers shall continue to be well treated. If you wish to eat and drink, there is nothing for it but to

do as those old women whom you do not like; that is to say, to spin. You have, as you know, a spindle and distaff there; you may rest assured that your rations will be scrupulously increased or diminished according to the quantity of thread that you spin.

(She shuts the wicket.)

Ros. Am I dreaming? Ho, Barberine! Ho, Jean! Ho, Albert! What does this mean? The door is as firm as a wall. It is fastened with iron bars: the windows are barred, and the wicket is no bigger than my cap. Ho, there somebody; open! open! open! open! It is I, Rosemberg. I am shut up here. Open, who will open to me? Is there any one here? I beg that you will open to me, if you please. Ho, you there, warder; open to me, sir, I beg you! I will make signs from the window. Hi, friend, come and open for me! He does not hear me. Open! open! I am shut up. This room is on the first storey. But what is this? will no one open to me?

Barb. (opening the wicket). My lord, these cries are of no use. It is beginning to get late. If you wish to sup, it is time to set about spinning.

(She shuts the wicket.)

Ros. Ah, well! it is a joke. Little rogue! she wants to rouse my spirit by this malicious freak. I shall be let out in a quarter of an hour. I am a great fool to trouble my head about it. Yes, not a doubt of it; it is just a trick; but it seems to me rather too bad. And all this might make me cut an absurd figure. Hum! to shut me up in a turret. Is a man of my rank to be treated with so

little respect? Fool that I am! This proves she loves me. She would not treat one with such freedom if she had not the sweetest recompense in store; that is clear. Perhaps it is to try my mettle; and my looks are watched. To disconcert them a little I must begin singing quite gaily. (*Singing*).

When the moorcock see
Sportsmen on the hill,
Hurrah by valley!
Hurrah by rill!
Hurrah for the gun
That is safe to kill—
Hurrah! fill up, lads,
Hurrah, lads, fill!

Kal. (opening the wicket). The mistress says that since you are not spinning, you will doubtless do without supper, and she thinks you are not hungry. So I wish you a good-night.

(*Shuts the wicket.*)

Ros. Kalekairi! Listen to me, do! Do listen! Come and keep me company a little while. Can I be caught in a trap? This looks serious. To pass the night here supperless; and it just happens that I am horribly hungry. How long shall I be left here? Certainly this is serious. Death and furies! Blood and thunder! Accursed Barberine! Infamous, wretched assassin! Curse upon you! unlucky dog that I am! they will wall up the door. I shall be left to die of hunger. It is Count Ulric's vengeance! Alas, alas! have pity on me! Count Ulric wishes my death, that

is certain ; and his wife executes his orders. Mercy, mercy, I am dead—I am lost ! Never again shall I see my father, my poor aunt Beatrix. Alas ! ah heavens ! alas ; it is all over with me ! Barberine ! Madame the Countess ! Dear Mademoiselle Kalekairi ! O rage ; fire and flames ! Oh, if ever I get out, they shall all perish by my hand. I will accuse them before the queen herself for assassins and poisoners. Ah God, ah heaven, have pity on me !

Barb. (opening the wicket). My lord, before going to bed I come to learn if you have been spinning.

Ros. I am no spinster ! No, I have not spun. I do not spin ; I am no spinster. Ah, Barberine, you shall pay for this.

Barb. My lord, when you have spun, you may tell the soldier who is mounting guard at your door.

Ros. Do not go away, Countess. In heaven's name, listen to me !

Barb. Spin, spin.

Ros. No, 'sdeath, zounds, I won't. I will break this distaff. No, I would sooner die.

Barb. Good-bye, my lord.

Ros. One word more ; do not go.

Barb. What do you want ?

Ros. But—Countess—in truth—I—don't know how to spin. How would you have me spin ?

Barb. Learn.

(She shuts the wicket.)

Ros. No ! never will I spin : not if the sky were to fall and crush me. What a refinement of cruelty ; there was

this Barberine in *deshabillé*. She is going to get into bed; almost undressed, with her net on, and a hundred times prettier than ever. Ah, night is coming. In an hour hence it will no longer be light. (*He sits down.*) So it is decided; there is no doubt left that not only am I in prison, but I am to be degraded by the lowest of tasks. If I do not spin, my death is certain. Hunger spurs me cruelly. It is six hours since I ate. Not a crumb since breakfast. Wretched Uladislas! may you die of hunger for your advice. What the devil did I come here for? What put such a thing into my head? Much had I to do with this Count Ulric and his prude of a countess. A pretty journey this! I had money, horses, and all was for the best. I might have amused myself at court. A plague on the undertaking. I shall have lost my patrimony, and I shall have learnt to spin. The light is waning more and more, and my hunger increases in proportion. Shall I be reduced to spin. No, a thousand times no! I would sooner die of hunger as a nobleman. The devil! Truly if I do not spin it will soon be too late! (*He rises.*) How is this distaff made? What infernal machine is this? I understand nothing about it. How does one set about it? I shall break everything. How complicated it is! Oh, heavens! I remember now she is looking at me. Most assuredly I will not spin.

A Voice outside. Who goes there?

(*The curfew sounds.*)

Ros. The curfew sounds. Barberine will be going to bed. The lights are beginning to show. The mules pass along

the road, and the cattle are coming back from the fields. Oh, heavens! to spend the night thus! here in this prison, without fire, light, or supper; cold and hunger! Ho, there, friend! Is there not a soldier on guard?

Barb. (opening the wicket). Well?

Ros. I am spinning, Countess, I am spinning. Send me some supper.

SCENE X.

Rosemberg. Kalekairi.

Kal. (coming in with two dishes). Here is supper. There are cucumbers and a lettuce salad.

Ros. Much obliged, indeed! You played the spy and now you are turnkey, wretched little Arab that you are! Why did you take my sequins?

Kal. (laying the purse on the table). Now I can give you them back.

Ros. Bah! money is no use to me in prison.

(Trumpets heard to sound.)

Who is that arriving? What noise is this? I hear a clatter of horses in the court.

Kal. It is the queen coming here.

Ros. The Queen, do you say?

Kal. And Count Ulric as well.

Ros. Count Ulric! The Queen! Ah! I am undone! Kalekairi, get me out of this!

Kal. No, you must stay here.

Ros. I will give you as many sequins as you like; but for pity's sake let me out. Tell your guard to let me pass.

Kal. No. Why did you come?

Ros. Ah! you may well ask. Where is the Countess? I want to ask her pardon, or rather to accuse her. Yes, accuse her before the Queen herself; for people cannot be shut up in this way. Where is your mistress?

Kal. On the doorstep, ready to receive the Queen.

Ros. And what the deuce is the Queen come here for?

Kal. Kalekairi had written.

Ros. To the Queen?

Kal. No; to Count Ulric.

Ros. And what about?

Kal. For them to come here.

Ros. And find me in this cavern?

Kal. No. When Kalekairi wrote she did not know you would be made spin.

Ros. Ah! So it was the Countess herself who was inspired with this charming idea.

Kal. Yes; and the Countess did not know that Kalekairi had written, for the Countess had written too.

Ros. She wrote too! Very kind of her.

Kal. Yes; while you were shouting so loud. She used to go and look, and then come back. But Kalekairi had written long before. Kalekairi had written as soon as you spoke to her.

Ros. So there was first you and then the Countess! Two denunciations in place of one! Nothing could be better. I was in good hands. Bewitched by two she-devils!

The Sentinel (on the doorstep). My lord, you are free. The Queen is coming.

Ros. That is very lucky. Good-bye, Kalekairi! Tell your mistress from me that I will not forgive her while I live. And as for you—may all your salads——

Kal. It is very wrong of you, for my mistress said she thought you very nice. Yes, and that you could not fail to win the hearts of many ladies at court, but that this house was not the right place.

Ros. Really! She said so? Well! Kalekairi, I think I forgive her. And as for you—if you choose to be discreet——

Kal. Oh, no!

Ros. What! You were boasting this morning——

Kal. It was to know more this evening. Here is the Queen, with all of them.

Ros. Ah! I am caught.

SCENE XI.

The same. The Queen. Ulric. Barberine. Courtiers, etc.

The Queen (to Barberine). Yes, Countess, we have been pleased to come ourself and visit you.

Barb. Madame, our poor house is not worthy to receive you.

The Queen. I count it an honour to be received here. *(To Rosenberg.)* Well, Rosenberg, and your wager?

Ros. Is lost, Madame, as you see.

Kal. Yes; lost with a vengeance.

The Queen. Are you pleased with your journey? What do you think of this castle? I hope you will not forget the hospitality it affords.

Ros. I shall not fail to remember it, Madame, whenever I am guilty of a folly.

Kal. (aside to Ros.) That will be often.

The Queen. It is a pity that this one should cost you somewhat dear.

Barb. Madame, if your majesty will deign to grant me a favour, I will ask your consent to let this wager be forgotten.

Ulric. I also ask it. If I had doubted of my wife's faith, I might profit by this wager, and be paid for my anxiety; but in all fairness I have gained nothing. Here is the only reward I care for.

(He takes his wife's hand.)

Ros. By my patron saint, here is a true man——

Kal. (aside to Ros.) You are cured, are you not?

The Queen. If so it pleases you, I am content; but our royal word is pledged, and we cannot forget that we stood witness to your quarrel. Therefore, Rosemberg, you shall pay!

Ros. Madame, the money is all ready.

Kal. What will your aunt Beatrix say?

The Queen. But you understand, Count Ulric, that if our justice ordains that the value of the wager should be handed to you, our power does not go so far as to constrain you to accept it. Therefore, Rosemberg, in this matter you shall make your suit to the Countess.

Ros. With all my heart, Madame; and were it possible——

The Queen. One moment. We have learnt the success of this adventure from the lips of the Countess herself. But these gentlemen do not know it, and it is right they should be informed, as they assisted like ourselves at the outset of the enterprise. Here are two letters which tell of it. Rosenberg, you shall read them to us.

Barb. Ah, Madame——

The Queen. Are you so generous? Well, I will read them myself. First, here is one addressed to the Count, which is not long, for it only contains one word—"Come."—Signed, "Kalekairi." Who wrote this?

Kal. It was I, Madame——

The Queen. You said little, and said well: that is a rare art. Now, gentlemen, here is the other:—"My very dear and honoured husband,—We have just had a visit at the chateau from the young Baron de Rosenberg, who said he was your friend, and sent by you. Though a woman generally—and rightly—keeps a secret of this nature, yet I will tell you that he has spoken to me of love. I hope that, at my instance and request, you will take no vengeance for this, and will conceive no hatred against him. He is a young man of good family, and has no harm at all in him. He only needed to know how to spin, and that I am going to teach him.—If you chance to see his father at court, tell him not to be uneasy. He is in our great hall on the first floor, where he has a spindle and distaff, and is spinning, or will spin. You will

think it extraordinary that I have chosen this occupation for him ; but as I perceived that while possessing good qualities he only lacked reflection, I thought it best to teach him this trade, which will permit him to reflect at his ease, whilst at the same time it may enable him to earn his living. You know that your great hall is closed with very solid bars. I told him to wait for me there, and I shut him in. There is a very convenient wicket in the wall, by which his food shall be passed to him, so that I do not doubt that he will leave here with much profit to himself ; and if in the course of his life there should befall him some misfortune, he will congratulate himself on having in his hands a sure means of livelihood for the rest of his days. I send you greeting, love, and an embrace.—BARBERINE.”

If you laugh at this letter, my lords, God keep your wives out of harm’s way. Nothing is so grave a matter as honour. Count Ulric, until to-morrow we will remain your guests ; and we purpose it should be known that we have made this journey, followed by our whole court, to let all see that the home which shelters an honourable woman is ground as holy as the Church, and that kings leave their palaces for the houses which are God’s.

THE END OF BARBERINE.

FANTASIO.

COMEDY IN TWO ACTS.

(PUBLISHED IN 1833; ACTED IN 1866.)

Dramatis Personæ.



THE KING OF BAVARIA.

THE PRINCE OF MANTUA.

MARINONI (*his aide-de-camp*).

RUTTEN (*secretary to the King*).

FANTASIO,	}	<i>young men of the town.</i>
SPARK,		
HARTMAN,		
FACIO,		

Officers, pages, etc.

ELSBETH, *daughter of the King of Bavaric.*

The Governess of Elsbeth.

The Scene is at Munich.

FANTASIO.



A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS.



ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.—*The Court.*

The King surrounded by his Courtiers. Rutten.

The King. My friends, it is already long since I announced to you the betrothal of my dear Elsbeth to the Prince of Mantua. To-day I announce to you the arrival of the Prince. This evening perhaps, to-morrow at latest, he will be in this palace. Let this be a day of rejoicing for everybody. Let the prisons be thrown open, and let the people pass the night in amusements. Rutten, where is my daughter?

(The Courtiers retire.)

Rut. Sire, she is in the park with her governess.

King. Why is it I have not seen her yet to-day? Is she sad or merry over this marriage that we are preparing?

Rut. It seemed to me that the Princess's countenance was clouded with some melancholy. What girl is there who does not dream the day before her nuptials? She was distressed about the death of St. Jean.

King. Can you believe it? The death of my jester, a court buffoon, hunchbacked and almost blind——

Rut. The Princess liked him.

King. Tell me, Rutten; you have seen the Prince. What kind of man is he? Alas, I am giving him the most precious thing I have in the world, and I know nothing of him.

Rut. My stay at Mantua was very short.

King. Speak frankly. Through what eyes, if not through yours, can I see truth?

Rut. Truly, your majesty, I can say nothing about the noble prince's mind and character.

King. Stands it so? A courtier like you hesitates. What a cloud of praises would already have filled the air of this room, how many hyperboles and flattering metaphors, if the prince who to-morrow will be my son-in-law had seemed to you worthy of the title! Can I be mistaken, my friend? Can I have chosen ill?

Rut. Sire, the Prince passes for being the best of kings. Policy is a subtle spider's web, in which struggles many a poor mangled fly——

King. I will sacrifice my daughter's happiness to no interest!

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

A street. Spark, Hartman, and Facio drinking round a table.

Hart. Since this is the Princess's wedding-day, let us drink, let us smoke, and let us try to make a noise.

Facio. It would not be a bad thing to mix with all this crowd of people who are tramping the streets, and then snuff a few torches on honest burghers' heads.

Spark. Come, come, let us smoke quietly.

Hart. I will do nothing quietly. If I had to turn bell-clapper and hang myself up in the big church bell, I must be chiming on a feast day. Now where the devil is Fantasio?

Spark. Let's wait for him; don't let us do anything without him.

Facio. Bah, he will find us out in any case. He is busy fuddling himself in some hole of the Rue Basse. Holloa, ho, one last cup!

(Raising his glass.)

An Officer (entering). Gentlemen, I come to beg you to be good enough to move further away, if you do not wish to be disturbed in your gaiety here.

Hart. Why, captain?

Officer. The Princess is this moment on the terrace you see yonder, and you will easily understand that it is not fitting that your shouts should reach her. *(Exit.)*

Facio. This is intolerable.

Spark. Why can't we laugh elsewhere as well as here?

Hart. Who is there to say we shall be allowed to laugh elsewhere? You will see that a green-coated rascal will spring up out of every street in the town to beg us go and laugh in the moon.

(Enter Marinoni, covered with a cloak.)

Spark. The Princess has never done an act of despotism in her life, God save her. If she does not want laughing, that is because she is sad, or because she is singing; let us leave her in quiet.

Facio. Humph! yonder is a hood that has got wind of some news. This quidnunc wants to accost us.

Mar. (approaching). I am a foreigner, gentlemen; what is the occasion of this festivity?

Spark. Princess Elsbeth is being married.

Mar. Ah, ah! she is a fine woman, as I suppose?

Hart. You have said it—just as you are a fine man.

Mar. Loved by her people, if I may venture the remark, for it seems to me that the whole place is illuminated.

Hart. You are not mistaken, honest stranger; all these lighted torches you see are, as you wisely remarked, nothing else than an illumination.

Mar. I meant by that to inquire if the Princess is the cause of these signs of joy?

Hart. The sole cause, mighty rhetorician. We might all marry in a body and there would be no sort of joy in this thankless town.

Mar. Happy the princess who knows how to make herself loved by her people.

Hart. Lighted torches do not make the happiness of a people, my primitive friend; that does not hinder the aforesaid princess from being as fanciful as a mock shepherdess.

Mar. Indeed; fanciful, you said.

Hart. I said so, dear incognito—I employed that word.

(*Marinoni bows and withdraws.*)

Facio. Who the deuce is this fellow after with his Italian jargon? There he is leaving us to get into talk with another group. He savours plaguey strong of the spy.

Hart. He savours of nothing at all; he is as stupid as you please.

Spark. Here comes Fantasio.

Hart. Why, what's the matter with him? He struts and jets like a justice of the peace. Either I am greatly mistaken or some mad prank is ripening in his brain.

Facio. Well, friend, what shall we make of this lovely evening?

Fant. (*entering*). Anything, absolutely anything except a new novel.

Facio. I was saying that we must plunge into this rabble and have a little sport.

Fant. The great thing would be to get cardboard noses and squibs.

Hart. Take girls by the waist, pull the tails of the burghers' wigs, and break the lanterns. Come, let's be off, the word is said.

Fant. Once on a time there was a King of Persia——

Hart. Come on, Fantasio.

Fant. I'm not for you, I'm not for you.

Hart. Why?

Fant. Give me a glass of that.

(*Drinking.*)

Hart. You have the month of May on your cheeks.

Fant. That's true; and January in my heart. My head is like an old grate without fire; nothing but wind and ashes in it. Ouf! (*Sitting down.*) What a plague it is that everybody should be amusing themselves! I would like this great heavy sky to be a huge cotton nightcap, to cover up this silly town and its silly inhabitants to the very ears. Come, for pity's sake let me hear some worn-out pun—something really hackneyed.

Hart. Why?

Fant. To make me laugh. I can laugh no more at folks' inventions; perhaps I shall laugh at what I know.

Hart. You seem to me a thought misanthropic and given to melancholy.

Fant. Not at all; it is only that I am coming from my mistress.

Facio. Yes or no—are you for our party?

Fant. I am for your party if you are for mine; let us stay here a little, talking of one thing or other, looking at our new clothes.

Facio. No, by my word. If you are tired of standing, I am tired of sitting; I must exert myself in the open air.

Fant. I don't feel like exertion. I am going to smoke

under these chestnuts with honest Spark here, who will keep me company—won't you, Spark?

Spark. As you please.

Hart. In that case, good-bye. We are going to see the sport.

(Exeunt Hartman and Facio. Fantasio sits down with Spark.)

Fant. How miserably that sunset is done! Nature is wretched this evening. Just look at the valley down there and these four or five sorry clouds climbing up the mountain. I used to do landscapes like that when I was twelve years old, on the back of my school copy-books.

Spark. What good tobacco! What good beer!

Fant. I must certainly be boring you, Spark.

Spark. No. Why so?

Fant. You bore me horribly. Does it not worry you to see yourself every day with the same face? What the devil are Hartman and Facio going to do at those sports?

Spark. They are two active lads that can't stay quiet.

Fant. Are not the "Arabian Nights" an admirable thing? Oh Spark, my dear Spark, if you would transport me to China! If I could only get out of my skin for an hour or two! If I could be that gentleman passing!

Spark. That seems to me fairly difficult.

Fant. That gentleman passing is delightful. Look, what fine silk breeches; what fine red flowers on his vest! His trinkets of his watch-chain dance on his belly, balancing the coat skirts that flutter about his calves. I am sure that man has a thousand ideas in his head that are perfectly

strange to me: his essence is peculiar to him. Alas! what men say to each other is all alike; the ideas they exchange are nearly always the same in every conversation; but in the interior of those isolated machines what folds there are, what secret compartments! What each man carries in him is an entire universe—an unknown world that is born and dies in silence. What solitudes are all these human bodies!

Spark. Can't you drink, you idle dog, instead of racking your brains?

Fant. Just one thing has amused me in the last three days; that is, that my creditors have got a warrant out against me, and that, if I set foot in my house, four tipstaves will appear to take me by the nape of the neck.

Spark. Really that is very cheerful. Where will you sleep this evening?

Fant. With the first girl I meet. Fancy that my furniture is being sold to-morrow morning. We'll buy in some of it, won't we?

Spark. Are you short of money, Henry? Will you have my purse?

Fant. Imbecile! If I had no money I should not have debts. I have a fancy to take a chorus girl for mistress.

Spark. That will bore you to extinction.

Fant. Not at all; my imagination will be full of pirouettes and white satin shoes; there will be a glove of mine on the balcony rail from the first of January to St. Sylvester, and I will hum clarionet solos in my dreams, till I die at last of an indigestion of strawberries, in the

arms of my well-beloved. Do you notice one thing, Spark—you and I have no position; we exercise no profession?

Spark. Is that what is depressing you?

Fant. There is no such thing as a melancholy fencing-master.

Spark. To my apprehension, you seem to have tried everything and found all wanting.

Fant. Ah! to have tried everything, my friend, one must have travelled far.

Spark. Well then?

Fant. Well then? Where would you have me go? Look at this dingy old town; there is not a square, a street, an alley, I have not prowled over thirty times; there is not a pavement I have not dragged my worn-out heels across, not a house where I don't know who is the girl or the old woman whose stupid head is eternally in relief at the window; I can't take a step without walking on yesterday's trail. Well, my dear friend, this town is nothing to my brain. All its nooks are a hundred times more familiar; all the streets and all the holes of my imagination a hundred times more worn out; I have strolled through that dilapidated brain, its sole inhabitant, in a hundred times more directions; I have fuddled myself in all its publics; I have rolled through it like an absolute monarch in a gilded chariot; I have ambled through it like an honest burgher on a quiet mule, and now I don't so much as dare enter there burglar-wise, with a dark lantern in my hand.

Spark. I cannot understand this perpetual working at yourself: now, when I smoke, for instance, my thought turns into tobacco smoke; when I drink, it turns into Spanish wine or Flemish beer; when I kiss my mistress's hand, it enters by the tips of her taper fingers to spread itself in electric currents through her whole being; the scent of a flower will set my mind at work, and the meanest object in the whole volume of universal nature is enough to change me to a bee winging my way hither and thither with a pleasure that is always fresh.

Fant. To put it briefly, you are fit to be a fisherman.

Spark. I am fit for anything if it amuses me.

Fant. Even to catch the moon in your teeth?

Spark. That would not amuse me.

Fant. Ah, ah! How do you know? To catch the moon in your teeth is not a thing to be despised. Let's go and play *trente et quarante*.

Spark. No indeed.

Fant. Why?

Spark. Because we should lose our money.

Fant. Ah! good heavens! what is this idea? You are at a loss to find something to harass your soul. Wretch! So you can only see the seamy side. Lose our money! Why, have you no faith in God, no hope left in your heart? Are you a frightful atheist, fit to wither my heart and rob me of all my beliefs—me, full of sap and youth as I am?

(*He begins dancing.*)

Spark. Upon my word, there are certain moments when I would not swear you were not mad.

Fant. (*still dancing*). Give me a bell, a bell of glass!

Spark. A bell—for what?

Fant. Has not Jean Paul said that a man absorbed in a great thought is like a diver under his bell in the midst of vast ocean? I have no bell, Spark, no bell; and I dance like Jesus Christ on the vast ocean.

Spark. Turn journalist or literary man, Henry; it is the most efficacious means left us to counteract misanthropy and deaden imagination.

Fant. Oh! I wish I could lose my heart to a lobster in mustard sauce, to a grisette, or a class of minerals. Spark, let's try to build a house together.

Spark. Why don't you write down all your dreams? They would make a nice collection.

Fant. A sonnet is better than a long poem, and a glass of wine is better than a sonnet. (*Drinks.*)

Spark. Why don't you travel? Go to Italy.

Fant. I have been there.

Spark. Well, don't you think that a fine country?

Fant. There are a quantity of flies there as big as cockchafers that sting you all night.

Spark. Go to France.

Fant. There's no good Rhine wine in Paris.

Spark. Go to England.

Fant. I am there. Have the English a country of their own? I had as soon see them here as at home.

Spark. Go to the devil then.

Fant. Oh! if only there were a devil in heaven: if there were a hell, how gladly I would blow out my

brains to go and see it all. What a wretched thing man is! Not to be able so much as to jump through a window without breaking his legs!—to be obliged to play the violin ten years to become a decent musician!—to learn in order to be a doctor or a groom!—to learn before he can make an omelette! Look, Spark, fancies come on me to sit down on a parapet and watch the river flowing, and fall to counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and so on to the day of my death.

Spark. This talk of yours would make many a man laugh; it makes me shudder; it is the history of the whole century. Eternity is a great eyry whence all the ages like young eaglets have in their turn taken wing to cross heaven and vanish. Ours has in its turn reached the nest's edge; but its pinions have been clipped, and it waits for death, looking out upon the space into which it cannot wing its way.

Fant. (singing)—

“Life of my life, say you: nay, soul, say, of my soul,

For soul it hath no ending, and life is but a day.”

Do you know a diviner song than that, Spark? It is Portuguese. That song never came into my head without making me want to love some one.

Spark. Whom, for instance?

Fant. Whom? I have not an idea—some lovely girl like the women Mieris draws, all swelling curves, something soft as the west wind, pale as the moonbeams; something pensive as the little inn girls you see in Dutch pictures, who hand the stirrup-cup to a jack-booted wayfarer sitting

straight as a stake on his tall white horse. Ah, the stirrup-cup, what a beautiful thing ! A young woman on her doorstep, the lighted fire seen at the back of her room, supper ready, children sleeping ; all the repose of a life of peace and quiet in one corner of the picture ; and there, the man still panting but firm in his saddle, with twenty leagues ridden and thirty to ride ; a mouthful of brandy and good-bye. The night is dark that way, the weather threatening, the forest perilous ; one moment the kind woman's eyes follow him, then as she turns in again to her fire she drops the glorious alms-gift of the poor : " God protect him."

Spark. Henry, if you were in love you would be the happiest man alive.

Fant. Love exists no longer, my dear friend. His foster-mother, Religion, has her breasts hanging like an old purse, with a great penny-piece in the heel of it. Love is a host that must be broken in twain at the foot of an altar to be swallowed in a mutual kiss ; there is no altar left, there is no love left. Long live nature ; there is still wine. (*Drinks.*)

Spark. You will get drunk.

Fant. I will get drunk ; you have said it.

Spark. It is a little late for that.

Fant. What do you call late ? is noon late ? is midnight early ? Where do you put the day ? *Spark*, I beg of you, let us stay. Let us drink, chat, analyse, reason unreason, talk politics ; let us devise governmental combinations ; let us catch all the cockchafers that pass round this candle and

put them in our pockets. Do you know that steam cannons are a fine thing in the way of philanthropy?

Spark. How do you mean?

Fant. There was once on a time a king who was very wise, and very, very happy——

Spark. What next?

Fant. The only thing wanting to his happiness was to have children. He caused public prayers to be offered in all the mosques——

Spark. What are you driving at?

Fant. I am thinking of my beloved "Arabian Nights." That is how they all begin. Stop, Spark, I am tipsy. I must do something or other. Tra la, tra la. Come, let's get up.

(A funeral passes.)

Hallo! honest men, who is that you are burying? This is not the proper hour for burying.

The Bearers. We are burying St. Jean.

Fant. Saint Jean dead? the king's jester dead? Who has got his place? the Lord Chief-Justice?

The Bearers. His place is vacant; you may take it if you choose.

(Exeunt.)

Spark. There is an impertinence you fairly brought on yourself. What were you thinking of to stop these people?

Fant. There is no impertinence. It is a friend's advice that this man gave me, and I am going to follow it on the spot.

Spark. You are going to turn court jester.

Fant. This very night, if they will have me. Since I cannot sleep at home, I wish to give myself the sight of the royal comedy that is to be played to-morrow, and that from the king's own box.

Spark. How clever! you will be recognised, and the lackeys will turn you out of doors. Are you not the late queen's godchild?

Fant. What a fool! I will put on a hump and red wig, like what Saint Jean wore, and no one will recognise me, not if I had three dozen godmothers at my heels.

(Knocking at a shop.)

Ho! honest man, open to me, if you are not out; you and your wife and your puppies.

A Tailor (opening the shop). What does your lordship desire?

Fant. Are you not the court tailor?

Tailor. At your service.

Fant. Was it you who used to make Saint Jean's clothes?

Tailor. Yes, sir.

Fant. You knew him? You know which side his hump was, how he curled his moustache, and what sort of wig he wore?

Tailor. Ho, ho! you are pleased to be merry, sir.

Fant. Man, I would not be merry: go into your back shop; and if you do not wish to be poisoned to-morrow in your coffee, meditate how to be silent as the grave about all that shall pass here.

(Exit with Tailor. Spark follows.)

SCENE III.—*An inn on the road to Munich.*

Enter the Prince of Mantua and Marinoni.

Prince. Well, Colonel?

Mar. Your highness?

Prince. Well, Marinoni?

Mar. Melancholic, fanciful, a madcap, submissive to her father, a great lover of green peas.

Prince. Write that down; I never understand a thing clearly unless I have it in a sloping hand.

Mar. (*writing*). Melancho——

Prince. Write under your breath. Since dinner I have been dreaming of an important project.

Mar. Your highness, there is what you desire.

Prince. Good; I appoint you my intimate friend; I know no better writing than yours in all my kingdom. Sit down a little distance off. So you think, my friend, that the character of my future spouse, the princess, is secretly known to you?

Mar. Yes, your highness; I have traversed the surroundings of the palace, and these tablets contain the chief heads of the different conversations in which I joined.

Prince (*viewing himself*). It seems to me that I am powdered like a man of the lowest class.

Mar. The coat is splendid.

Prince. What would you say, Marinoni, if you saw your master don a plain olive frock-coat?

Mar. His highness mocks my credulity.

Prince. No, Colonel. Learn that your master is the most romantic of men.

Mar. Romantic, your highness?

Prince. Yes, my friend (I granted you this title), the important project that I meditate is one unheard of in my family. I propose to arrive at the king, my father-in-law's court, in the garb of a plain aide-de-camp; it is not enough to have sent a man of my household to collect public rumours concerning the future Princess of Mantua (and that man, Marinoni, is yourself); I wish further to observe with my own eyes.

Mar. Is this true, your highness?

Prince. Do not stand aghast. A man like me should have as intimate friend none but a vast and enterprising spirit.

Mar. One thing alone seems to me to oppose your highness's design.

Prince. What?

Mar. The idea of such a masquerade could only belong to the glorious prince who rules us. But if my gracious sovereign is confounded with the staff, to whom will the King of Bavaria do the honours of a splendid banquet which is to take place in the great gallery?

Prince. You are right; if I disguised myself some one must take my place. That is impossible, Marinoni; I had not thought of that!

Mar. Why impossible, your highness?

Prince. I may certainly lower the princely dignity as far

as the rank of colonel ; but how can you think that I would consent to elevate to my rank any man, be he who he may ? Besides, do you think that my future father-in-law would forgive me ?

Mar. The king passes for a man of much sense and wit, with an agreeable humour.

Prince. Oh ! it is not without reluctance that I give up my project. To penetrate into this new court without pomp or noise, to observe everything, to approach the princess under an assumed name, perhaps to win her hand ! Oh ! I grow dizzy ! it is impossible. Marinoni, my friend, try on my state dress ; I cannot resist it.

Mar. (*bowing low*). Your highness !

Prince. Do you think future ages will soon forget such a circumstance ?

Mar. Never, my gracious prince !

Prince. Come and try on my coat.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.—*Garden of the King of Bavaria.**Enter Elsbeth and her Governess.*

Gov. My poor eyes have wept for him, wept a torrent of rain.

Elsb. You are so kind. I loved Saint Jean too; he was so witty. He was no common jester.

Gov. To think that he departed, poor fellow, the very day before your betrothal. He who spoke, dinner and supper, of nothing but you as long as the day lasted. Such a lively, merry fellow too, that he made ugliness lovable, and that eyes in their own despite could not choose but follow him.

Elsb. Don't talk to me of my marriage; that is a worse mishap yet.

Gov. Don't you know that the Prince of Mantua comes to-day? Folk say he is an Amadis.

Elsb. What is that you say, my dear? He is horrible and idiotic, and everybody here knows that already.

Gov. Really; I had been told he was an Amadis.

Elsb. I did not ask for an Amadis, my dear; but it

is a cruel thing sometimes to be nothing but a king's daughter. My father is the best of men; the marriage he is arranging assures the peace of his kingdom; he will find his recompense in a people's blessing; but as for me, alas! I shall have his, and that is all——

Gov. How sadly you speak!

Elsb. If I refused the prince, war would soon be set on foot once more; it is a pity these treaties of peace are always signed with tears. I wish I could be a strong-minded woman, and resign myself to wed the first-comer when policy demands it. To be the mother of a people may console high hearts but not weak brains. I am only a poor dreamer; perhaps the blame lies with your romances, for you have one always in your pocket.

Gov. Mercy! never speak of it.

Elsb. I have small skill of life and many dreams.

Gov. If the Prince of Mantua is such as you say, God will not let this affair be concluded, I am certain.

Elsb. You think so! God leaves men to themselves, my poor friend, and scarcely heeds our prayers more than the bleatings of a sheep.

Gov. I am sure if you refused the prince, your father would put no constraint on you.

Elsb. Certainly he would not constrain me, and that is why I sacrifice myself. Would you have me go to my father and bid him forget his word, and with one stroke of the pen erase his honourable name from a contract that makes thousands happy. What matter that it makes one woman wretched? I let my good father be a good king.

Gov. Ee! Ee! (*Cries.*)

Elsb. Don't cry over it, my kind girl; you might perhaps make me cry myself; and a royal betrothed must not have red eyes. Don't afflict yourself over all this. After all I shall be a queen, perhaps that is amusing; perhaps I shall acquire a taste for my jewels—how can I tell? for my coaches and my new court. Happily marriage brings a princess something else besides a husband. Perhaps I shall find happiness folded away under my trousseau.

Gov. You are a perfect paschal lamb.

Elsb. Come, my dear, let us begin anyhow by laughing at this; we shall be free to cry when the time comes for tears. They say the Prince of Mantua is the most laughable creature in the world.

Gov. If Saint Jean were here!

Elsb. Ah, Saint Jean! Saint Jean!

Gov. You were very fond of him, my child!

Elsb. It is odd; his wit bound me to him with imperceptible threads that seemed to come from my heart; his perpetual mockery of my romantic ideas delighted me beyond measure. Whilst I can scarcely tolerate many a person who is just of my own way of thinking, I don't know what it was about him; something in his eyes, in his motions, in the way he took his snuff. He was a strange man; as he spoke to me delicious pictures passed before my eyes; his speech gave life, as if by enchantment, to the unlikeliest things.

Gov. He was a real Triboulet.

Elsb. I don't know about that; but he was a gem of wit.

Gov. Here is a hurry-scurry of pages. I think the Prince will not be long in making his appearance; you should go back to the palace to dress.

Elsb. I entreat of you, leave me another quarter of an hour. Go and get ready what I need. Alas! my dear, I have little time left for dreams now.

Gov. Good heavens! is it possible that this marriage should be accomplished if you dislike it; a father sacrifice his daughter! The king would be a perfect Jephtha if he did that.

Elsb. Don't speak evil of my father. Go, dear, and look me out what I want.

(Exit Governess.)

Elsb. (alone). It seems to me there is some one behind those shrubs. Is it the ghost of my poor jester that I see sitting in the meadow among the corn-flowers? Answer me; who are you? What are you about there pulling those flowers?

(She advances towards the mound.)

Fant. (sitting, dressed as a jester, hump and wig). I am an honest flower-picker, who wishes good-day to your fair face.

Elsb. What is the meaning of this accoutrement? Who are you that you should come and travesty a man I loved with that great wig of yours? Are you apprenticed to buffoonery?

Fant. So please your most serene highness, I am the king's new jester; the major-domo has accorded me a favourable reception. Since yesterday evening the scullions

have become my patrons; and I am modestly picking flowers till the wit comes to me.

Elsb. It seems to me highly questionable whether that is a flower you will ever pluck——

Fant. Why? wit may visit a man who is old just as it might a girl. Sometimes it is so nice a matter to tell a witty sally from a piece of flat stupidity. Speak plenty; there you have the main point: the worst shot may hit the bull's-eye with a pistol if he fires seven hundred and eighty rounds a minute, just as well as the most skilful marksman who only fires his one or two well aimed. I only ask to be fed suitably to the girth of my belly, and I will watch my shadow in the sunlight to see if my wig is growing.

Elsb. So that here you are, clad in Saint Jean's cast-offs. You do well to speak of your shadow: so long as you wear the costume, it will always, I believe, be liker him than you are.

Fant. At this moment I am composing an elegy that will decide my fate.

Elsb. In what sort?

Fant. It will prove clearly that I am the head man of the universe, or else indeed it will be worth nothing. I am busy turning the universe upside down to get it into an acrostic. Moon, sun, and stars fight for a place in my rhymes, like schoolboys at the entry of a melodrama playhouse.

Elsb. Poor fellow! what a business you have taken in hand—to be witty at so much an hour! Have you no arms

or legs, and would you not do better to plough and harrow earth than your own brain?

Fant. Poor child! what a business you have taken in hand—to marry a fool you never saw! Have you no head or heart, and would you not do better to sell your dresses than sell your body?

Elsb. This is bold, sir new-comer.

Fant. What do you call this flower, pray?

Elsb. A tulip. What are you for proving?

Fant. A red tulip or a blue tulip?

Elsb. Blue as it appears to me.

Fant. Not a bit of it; it is a red tulip.

Elsb. Do you want to put a new-fashioned coat on an old adage? You do not need that, to tell me that about tastes and colours there is no disputing.

Fant. I am not disputing: I tell you this tulip is a red tulip, and yet I allow it is blue.

Elsb. How do you settle that?

Fant. Like your marriage. What man under the sun can say whether he was born blue or red: the very tulips know nothing of it: gardeners and lawyers make such extraordinary grafts that apples turn pumpkins, and that thistles leave the ass's mouth to be drowned in sauce on a bishop's silver plate. This tulip you see no doubt expected to be red; but it was married; it is quite surprised at being blue; this is how the whole world is metamorphosed under the hands of man; and poor my lady nature must laugh in her own face heartily from time to time when she surveys in her lakes and her seas this eternal masquerade of

hers. Do you believe that was how the rose smelt in Moses' paradise? It only smelt of green hay. The rose is a daughter of civilisation; a marchioness just like you or I.

Elsb. The hawthorn's pale flower may turn to a rose, and a thistle to an artichoke; but one flower cannot be made into another: so what matter to nature? You cannot change her; you beautify her or you kill. The meanest violet would die rather than yield if some one wanted, through artificial means, to alter its form by one stamen.

Fant. That is why I think more of a violet than of a king's daughter.

Elsb. There are certain things which even jesters have no right to mock at: bear that in mind. If you listened to my conversation with my governess, mind your ears.

Fant. Not my ears, but my tongue. You miss the sense; your words have the wrong sense.

Elsb. Pun me no puns, if you would earn your money, and avoid comparing me to tulips if you don't want to earn something else.

Fant. Who knows? a pun consoles many griefs, and playing with words is as good a way as any other to play with thoughts, actions, and creatures. All in this world below is one great joke, and it is as hard to read the looks of a child of four years old as to construe the rubbish of three modern melodramas.

Elsb. You seem to me to look out on the world through a somewhat changing prism.

Fant. We all have our spectacles, but no one can tell to

a shade the colour of the glass. Who can tell me to a nicety whether I am happy or unhappy, good or bad, sad or merry, dull or witty?

Elsb. You are ugly at least ; so much is certain.

Fant. Not surer than your beauty. Here comes your father with your future husband. Who can say whether you will marry him?

(Exit.)

Elsb. Since I cannot avoid the interview with the Prince of Mantua, I shall do as well to go to meet him.

(Enter the King, Marinoni in Prince's costume, and the Prince dressed as aide-de-camp.)

King. Prince, here is my daughter. Pardon her gardening dress. Here, you are under the roof of a citizen who governs other citizens, and our etiquette is as indulgent toward ourselves as toward them.

Mar. Allow me to kiss this charming hand, madam, if it be not too great a favour for my lips.

Princess. Your highness will excuse me if I go into the palace. I shall see your highness, I presume, in a more fitting manner at to-night's levée.

(Exit.)

Prince. The Princess is right ; here is a divine modesty.

King (to Marinoni). Who is this aide-de-camp, pray, who dogs you like your shadow? It is intolerable to me to hear him vent an inept remark at whatever we say. Send him away, I beg.

(Marinoni whispers the Prince).

Prince. It is very adroit on your part to have persuaded

him to dismiss me. I will try to meet the Princess, and drop a few delicate words to her without seeming to mean anything.

(Exit.)

King. That aide-de-camp is an imbecile, my friend. What use can the fellow be ?

Mar. Hum ! hum ! Let us push on a few steps farther, by your Majesty's leave. I think I see a perfectly charming summer-house in this thicket.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE II.—*Another part of the garden.*

Enter the Prince.

Prince. My disguise suits me to admiration. I observe and I win hearts. So far all runs to the measure of my wishes. The father seems to me a great king, though a little unconventional, and it would surprise me if I have not found favour with him from the very first. I see the Princess returning to the palace. Chance favours me strangely. *(Enter Elsbeth ; the Prince approaches her.)* Your highness, permit a loyal servant of your future spouse to offer you the congratulations that overflow at sight of you from his humble and devoted heart. Happy are the great ones of earth ; they can wed with you, not I. That is an absolute impossibility for me. I am of obscure birth ; all my wealth is a name the foeman dreads ; a heart pure and unspotted beats under this poor uniform. I am a poor soldier, riddled from head to foot with bullets. I have not a ducat. I am

a solitary and an exile from my native land, as I am from my country in heaven, that is from the paradise of my dreams. I have no woman's heart to press to mine. I am accursed and silent.

Elsb. What would you have with me, my dear sir? Are you mad, or are you asking for alms?

Prince. How hard a task it would be to find words to express my feelings! I saw you passing, unaccompanied, in this garden path; I thought it my duty to throw myself at your feet, and offer you my company as far as the postern.

Elsb. I am obliged to you. Do me the service to leave me undisturbed. (*Exit.*)

Prince (sol.). Can I have been wrong to accost her? Nevertheless, it was necessary, since I entertain the project of seducing her under my assumed garb. Yes, I did well to accost her. Nevertheless, she answered me in a disagreeable manner. Perhaps I ought not to have pressed her so hotly. Yet it was absolutely necessary, since her marriage is all but settled, and since I am to step into my deputy Marinoni's shoes. I was right to be so hot with her. But the answer mislikes me. Can she have a false, hard heart? It would be well to sound the matter dexterously.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE III.—*An ante-chamber.*

Fantasio lying on a carpet.

Fant. What a delicious life is this jester's! I was tipsy yesterday, I think, when I assumed this costume, and

presented myself at the palace ; but upon my word, never did sound reason inspire me with an idea that was worth this act of folly. I make my appearance, and here I am accepted, petted, put on the books, and, better still, forgotten. I come and go in this palace as if I had lived in it all my life. I met the king a moment ago ; he had not so much as the curiosity to look at me. His jester being dead, they told him, “Sire, here is another !” It is admirable. Thank God, there is my mind at rest ; I can play all the pranks possible without a word said to prevent me. I am one of the King of Bavaria’s domestic animals, and if I choose, so long as I keep my hump and my wig, they will let me live between a spaniel and a guinea-fowl, till the day of my death. Meanwhile, my creditors may break their noses against my door at their leisure. I am just as much in safety here, under this wig, as I should be in the West Indies.

Is not that the Princess I see through this glass in the next room ? She is putting a few touches to her wedding veil ; two long tears are trickling down her cheeks ; look, there is one detaching itself and falling on her breast like a pearl. Poor child : I overheard her talk with the governess this morning ; on my faith it was by accident ; I was sitting on the turf without any purpose but to sleep. Now there she is crying, and never suspecting that I see her again. Ah ! were I a student of rhetoric, how profound would be my reflections on this crowned misery, this poor ewe lamb, round whose neck they are tying a pink ribbon to lead her to the slaughter-house ! That little girl is romantic, no doubt : it is a cruel trial to her to wed a man she does not know.

Yet she sacrifices herself in silence. How capricious fortune is! needs must I get drunk, meet Saint Jean's funeral, assume his garb and his place, play in short the maddest trick that ever was played, just to come and through this glass see falling the only two tears perhaps that the child will shed on her unhappy wedding veil.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE IV.—*A garden walk.*

The Prince. Marinoni.

Prince. You are no better than a fool, Colonel——

Mar. Your highness labours under a most painful error in regard to me.

Prince. You are an arch blockhead. Could you not prevent that? I entrust to you the greatest project which has been conceived these God knows how many years, and you, my best friend, my most loyal servant, pile up blunder upon blunder. No, no; it is all very fine talking—that is in no way to be forgiven.

Mar. How could I prevent your highness from drawing down upon yourself the inconveniences which are the necessary consequence of the part you are supposed to play? You order me to take your name and behave like a real Prince of Mantua. Can I prevent the King of Bavaria from offering an affront to my aide-de-camp? You were wrong to interfere in our business.

Prince. I should like to see an upstart like you take upon himself to give me orders.

Mar. Reflect, your highness, that nevertheless I must be the prince or must be the aide-de-camp. It is by your order I act.

Prince. Tell me before the whole court that I am an impertinent fellow because I wanted to kiss the Princess's hand! I am ready to declare war upon him and return to my States, to put myself at the head of my armies.

Mar. Do remember, your highness, that this sorry compliment was addressed to the aide-de-camp and not to the prince. Do you claim to be respected in that disguise?

Prince. That will do. Give me back my coat.

Mar. (taking off the coat). If my sovereign makes a point of it, I am ready to die for him.

Prince. Upon my word, I don't know what conclusion to come to. On the one hand I am furious at what happens to me, and on the other I am miserable at giving up my plan. The Princess appears to reply not with indifference to the double meanings with which I unremittingly pursue her. Already I have gone so far two or three times as to whisper her things you would not believe. Come, let us think it all over.

Mar. (holding the coat.) What shall I do, your highness?

Prince. Put it on, put it on; and let us go into the palace.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE V.

Princess Elsbeth. The King.

King. Daughter, you must give a frank answer to my question: do you dislike this marriage?

Elsb. It is for you, sire, to answer it yourself. I like it if you like it ; I dislike it if you dislike it.

King. The Prince appeared to me to be a commonplace man, of whom it is hard to find anything to say. His aide-de-camp's silliness is the only thing that damages him in my opinion. As for himself, he is perhaps a kind prince, but he is not a man of breeding. There is nothing in him that attracts me or repels me. What can I say to you on this subject ? The hearts of women have secrets that I cannot know : sometimes they make such strange heroes for themselves ; they seize so oddly upon one or two sides in the nature of the man presented to them, that it is impossible to judge for them, when one is not guided by some obvious point. Tell me plainly then what you think of your betrothed.

Elsb. I think that he is Prince of Mantua, and that war will begin again to-morrow between you and him if I do not marry him.

King. That is certain, my child.

Elsb. I think accordingly that I will marry him, and that the war will be ended.

King. May the blessings of my people give thanks on thy father's behalf ! Ah, my sweet daughter ! I should be happy in this alliance, but I would fain not see that sadness in these fair blue eyes give the lie to their resignation. Reflect a few days yet.

(*Exit. Enter Fantasio.*)

Elsb. There you are, poor lad ! How do you like your life here ?

Fant. As a bird its freedom.

Elsb. You might have answered better, as a bird its cage. This palace is a fine cage enough, yet it is one.

Fant. The dimensions of a palace or a room do not make man more or less free. The body moves where it can: imagination sometimes spreads its wings as wide as heaven in a dungeon scarce bigger than my hand.

Elsb. So you are a happy fool then?

Fant. Very happy. I hold conversation with the puppies and the scullions. There is a cur only so high in the kitchen who said charming things to me.

Elsb. In what language?

Fant. In the purest style. He would not make a single mistake in grammar in the space of a year.

Elsb. Could I hear a few words in this style?

Fant. By my word, I would not have you to; it is a tongue that is peculiar to him. It is only curs that speak it; the trees and the very ears of wheat know it too; but king's daughters don't know it. When is your wedding to be?

Elsb. In a few days it will be all over.

Fant. That is to say, it will all be begun. I mean to offer you a present from my own hand.

Elsb. What present? You make me anxious.

Fant. I mean to offer for your acceptance a pretty little stuffed canary bird, that sings like a nightingale.

Elsb. How can he sing if he is stuffed?

Fant. It sings to perfection.

Elsb. Oh my word, you show a rare persistence in your mockery of me.

Fant. Not at all. My canary has a little musical-box

in his stomach. You touch gently a little spring under the left claw, and he sings all the new operas exactly like Mademoiselle Grisi.

Elsb. It is an invention of your brain, doubtless?

Fant. By no means. It is a court canary: there are plenty of very well-brought-up little girls who work in precisely the same manner. They have a little spring under their left arm—a nice little spring of fine diamond, like a dandy's watch. The tutor or governess sets the spring working, and immediately you see the lips open with the most gracious smile. A charming cascade of honeyed words issues with the softest murmuring, and all the social decencies like light-foot nymphs forthwith fall a-tripping on tiptoe round the marvellous fountain. The aspirant opens dumbfounded eyes; the company whisper indulgently; and the father, filled with a secret satisfaction, proudly contemplates his golden shoe-buckles.

Elsb. You seem to recur willingly to certain subjects. Tell me, fool, what can the poor young women have done to you to make you satirise them so light-heartedly? Cannot regard for any duty find favour in your eyes?

Fant. I have a deal of respect for ugliness. That is why I respect myself so profoundly.

Elsb. You seem sometimes to know more than your words say. Where do you come from then, and who are you, that you who have been here but one day can already fathom mysteries which princes themselves will never suspect? Are your follies aimed at me, or are you talking at random?

Fant. I am talking at random. Random and I are old friends.

Elsb. Indeed! He seems to have told you what you had no business to know. I am ready to believe that you spy upon my actions and my words.

Fant. Heaven knows! What matter is it to you?

Elsb. More than you can fancy. A moment ago in this room, while I was putting on my veil, I suddenly heard a step behind the tapestry. I am greatly mistaken if the step was not yours.

Fant. Be sure that that will always be between me and your pocket-handkerchief. I am no more indiscreet than inquisitive. What pleasure could your vexations give me? What vexation could your pleasures give me? You are this; I am that. You are young; and I am old. Fair; and I am ugly. Rich; and I am poor. You see plainly that we have nothing in common. What does it matter to you that chance on his grand highway has made two wheels cross that do not follow the same rut, and which cannot mark the same dust? Is it my fault if, while I slept, one of your tears fell on my cheek?

Elsb. You speak to me in the guise of a man I loved. That is why I listen to you in my own despite. My eyes think they see Saint Jean; but perhaps you are only a spy.

Fant. What good would that do me? Suppose it were true that your marriage cost you a few tears; suppose that I had learnt the fact by chance, what should I gain by going to blab of it? No one would give me a pistole for

the news ; and no one would put you in the Black Hole. I understand very well that it must be a great bore to marry the Prince of Mantua ; but, after all, it is not I who undertook it. To-morrow, or the day after, you will be off to Mantua with your wedding-dress, and I shall be here still on this stool in my old hose. Why would you have me bear you a grudge ? I have no reason to desire your death. You never lent me money.

Elsb. But if chance made you see what I would have hidden, should I not turn you out of doors for fear of a fresh accident ?

Fant. Do you mean to compare me to a tragedy confidant ? and are you afraid that I should follow your shadow declaiming ? Do not send me away, I beg. I amuse myself excellently here. Stay ; there is your governess coming up with a pocket-full of mysteries. The proof that I will not eavesdrop is, that I am off to the pantry to eat a plover's wing, which the major-domo set apart for his wife.

(*Exit.*)

Gov. (entering). Do you know a terrible thing, my dear Elsbeth ?

Elsb. What do you mean ? You are trembling all over.

Gov. The Prince is not the Prince, nor the aide-de-camp either. It is a perfect fairy tale.

Elsb. What is this comedy of errors ?

Gov. Hush, hush ! It is one of the Prince's own officers who has just told me. The Prince of Mantua is a regular Alma Viva. He is in disguise, and hidden among

his aides-de-camp. No doubt he sought to see you, and make acquaintance in fairy fashion. He is in disguise, worthy gentleman. He is disguised like Lindor. The man who was presented to you as your future husband is only an aide-de-camp named Marinoni.

Elsb. This is impossible!

Gov. It is certain—a thousand times certain. The worthy man is disguised; it is impossible to recognise him. It is an extraordinary thing.

Elsb. You have this from an officer, you say?

Gov. From an officer of the Prince. You can question him yourself.

Elsb. And he did not show you the true Prince of Mantua among the aides-de-camp?

Gov. Consider that he was trembling himself, poor man, at the things he was telling me. He only entrusted me with his secret because he wishes to be agreeable to you, and because he knew I would let you know. As for Marinoni, that is positive; but for what concerns the real Prince, he did not point him out.

Elsb. If that were true, it would give me some matter for thought. Come, bring this officer to me.

(Enter a Page.)

Gov. What is the matter, Flamel? You appear out of breath.

Page. Ah, madam! it is enough to kill one with laughing. I dare not speak before your highness.

Elsb. Speak out; what more news is there?

Page. At the moment when the Prince of Mantua was

entering the court on horseback at the head of his staff, his wig was carried up into the sky and disappeared on a sudden.

Elsb. What is this all about? What idiocy!

Page. Madam, I wish I may die if it is not the truth. The wig was carried up into the air at the point of a hook. We found it in the pantry beside a broken bottle; no one knows who played this trick. But the Duke is no less furious for that, and he has sworn that unless the author of the prank is punished with death he will declare war on the king, your father, and spread blood and fire everywhere.

Elsb. Come and hear the whole story, dear. My gravity begins to forsake me.

(Enter another Page.)

Elsb. Well—what news?

Page. Madam, the king's jester is in prison; it was he who pulled off the Prince's wig.

Elsb. The jester in prison? and by the Prince's orders?

Page. Yes, your highness.

Elsb. Come, mother dear, I must speak.

(Exit with Governess.)

SCENE VI.

The Prince. Marinoni.

Prince. No, no; let me unmask. It is time I should burst upon them. It shall not be allowed to pass thus. Blood and fire! a royal wig at the end of a hook and line. Are we among barbarians in the deserts of Siberia? Is

there still any civilisation or decency left under the sun? I foam with rage; my eyes are starting out of my head.

Mar. You ruin all by this violence.

Prince. This father too, this King of Bavaria, this monarch, exalted in all last year's almanacs! this man whose exterior is so seemly, who expresses himself in such measured terms, and then falls a-laughing at the sight of his son-in-law's wig flying in the air! For, after all, I admit it was your wig, Marinoni, that was pulled off; but still, was it not the wig of the Prince of Mantua, since it is he folk think they see in you? When I think that had it been I myself in flesh and blood, my wig would perhaps—— Ah! there is a providence. When God suddenly sent me the notion to travesty myself; when that lightning-flash traversed my thoughts, "I must travesty myself," this fatal event was foreseen by destiny. He it is who saved from the most unendurable affront the head that rules my peoples. But, by heaven! all shall be known. This treason against my dignity has been too long. Since the majesties, human and divine, are pitilessly violated and mangled; since the ideas of good and evil exist no longer among mankind; since the king of several thousands of human beings bursts into laughter like a groom at sight of a wig, Marinoni, give me back my coat.

Mar. (taking off the coat). If my sovereign commands, I am ready to suffer a thousand tortures for him.

Prince. I know your devotion. Come, I am going to tell the king my mind in proper terms.

Mar. You refuse the Princess's hand? yet she ogled you unmistakably all through dinner.

Prince. You think so? I am lost in an abyss of perplexities. Come, anyhow, let us go to the king.

Mar. (holding the coat). What am I to do, your highness?

Prince. Put it on again for a moment. You shall return it to me directly; they will be far more petrified if they hear me take the tone that befits me in this dark-coloured morning coat.

SCENE VII.—*A prison.*

Fantasio (sol.).

Fant. I don't know whether there is a providence, but it is amusing to believe in one. Nevertheless, here was a poor little princess going to be forced into a marriage with a provincial square-toes, on whose head chance had dropped a crown, like the tortoise that the eagle let fall on Æschylus. All preparations were made, tapers lit, bridegroom powdered, and the poor little girl's confession made. She had dried the two charming tears I saw fall this morning. Nothing was wanting but two or three priestly mummeries to formally accomplish the misfortune of her life. In all this was involved the fortune of two kingdoms, the tranquillity of two peoples; and needs must I have the fancy to disguise myself as a hunchback, to come and fuddle myself again in our good king's buttery, and fish up at the end of a string his dear ally's wig. Upon my word, when I am drunk I believe there is something superhuman about me.

Here is the marriage off, and the whole question reopened. The Prince of Mantua has demanded my head in exchange for his wig. The King of Bavaria considered the penalty a trifle severe, and only agreed to imprison me. The Prince of Mantua, thanks be to God, is such a dolt that he would rather be chopped in pieces than yield an inch. So the Princess remains single, at least for this bout. If there is not in that the subject for an epic poem in twelve cantos, I am no judge. Pope and Boileau have written admirable verses on subjects far less important. Oh, were I a poet! How I would paint the scene of that wig fluttering in the wind! But the man who is capable of such exploits disdains to write of them. So posterity must do without it.

(He falls asleep. Enter Elsbeth and her governess, lamp in hand.)

Elsb. He is asleep. Close the door gently.

Gov. Look, there is not a doubt about it. He has taken off his false wig, and his deformity has disappeared along with it. Look at him, such as he is, such as his people behold him on his triumphal car. It is the noble Prince of Mantua.

Elsb. Yes, it is he. Then my curiosity is satisfied. I wanted to see his countenance, that is all. Let me bend over him. *(Taking the lamp.)* Psyche, beware of your drop of oil.

Gov. He is as beautiful as a god.

Elsb. Why did you give me so many romances and fairy tales to read? Why did you sow my poor thoughts so thick with strange, mysterious flowers?

Gov. How you palpitate, a tip-toe on your little feet!

Elsb. He is waking. Let us be off.

Fant. (*waking*). Is it a dream? I have hold of the hem of a white dress.

Elsb. Loose me, let me go——

Fant. You, Princess? If it is the pardon of the king's jester that you bring me so divinely, let me put on my hump and my wig. It is the work of a moment.

Gov. Ah, prince, how ill it becomes you to receive us thus! Do not resume that garb; we know all.

Fant. Prince? Where do you see one?

Gov. What use in dissembling?

Fant. I do not dissemble the least in the world. What chance makes you call me prince?

Gov. I know my duty towards your highness.

Fant. Madam, I entreat you to explain me this good lady's words. Is there really some whimsical mistake, or am I the object of a joke?

Elsb. Why ask when you yourself are the mocker?

Fant. Do I chance to be a prince then? Can there be some doubt cast on my mother's honour?

Elsb. Who are you, if you are not the Prince of Mantua?

Fant. My name is Fantasio. I am a burgher of Munich.

(*Shows a letter.*)

Elsb. A burgher of Munich? And why are you disguised? What are you doing here?

Fant. Madam, I entreat your pardon.

(*Falling on his knees.*)

Elsb. What is the meaning of this? Rise, and leave

this place! I remit in your favour a punishment that perhaps it may be you deserve. What prompted this action of yours?

Fant. I cannot tell the motive that led me here.

Elsb. You cannot tell? and yet I will know it.

Fant. Pardon me, I dare not avow it.

Gov. Let us go, Elsbeth: do not expose yourself to hear words unworthy of your ears. This man is either a thief or an impertinent fellow, who will speak to you of love.

Elsb. I will know the reason that caused you to assume this garb.

Fant. I entreat of you, spare me.

Elsb. No, no! Speak, or I close this door on you for ten years.

Fant. Madam, I am head over ears in debt; my creditors have got a warrant out against me. At this very moment my furniture is sold, and were I not in this prison I should be in another. I was to be arrested yesterday at nightfall. Not knowing where to pass the night, nor how to avoid the bailiffs' pursuit, I conceived the idea of donning this costume, and seeking refuge at the king's feet. If you restore me to liberty I shall be taken by the shoulder. My uncle is a miser, who lives on potatoes and radishes, and leaves me to die of hunger in all the public-houses of the kingdom. Since you must know it, I owe twenty thousand crowns.

Elsb. Is all this true?

Fant. If I lie, may I pay them.

(*A noise of horse is heard.*)

Gov. There are horses passing ; it is the king in person. If I could signal to a page. (*Calling out of window.*) Ho ! Flamel, where are you going ?

Page (*outside*). The Prince of Mantua is going to depart.

Gov. The Prince of Mantua ?

Page. Yes ; war is declared. There was a terrible scene between him and the king before all the court, and the Princess's marriage is broken off.

Elsb. Do you hear that, Monsieur Fantasio ? You have put a stop to my marriage.

Gov. Great heavens ! The Prince of Mantua is going, and I shall not have seen him.

Elsb. If war is declared, how sad !

Fant. Sad, you call it, your highness ? Would you sooner have a husband who makes his wig a *casus belli* ? Well, madam, if war is declared, we shall know what to do with our hands. The loungers of our promenades will put on their uniforms. I myself will take my shot-gun, if it is not sold yet. We shall go for a tour in Italy, and if ever you enter Mantua, it shall be as a real Queen, without need of other candles than our swords.

Elsb. Fantasio, will you stay as my father's jester. I will pay your twenty thousand crowns.

Fant. I should accept with all my heart ; but on my word, if I were forced to it, I would jump out of window to make my escape one of these days.

Elsb. Why ? You see Saint Jean is dead ; a jester is an absolute necessity——

Fant. I prefer that trade to any other; but I cannot work at any trade. If you think that I deserve twenty thousand crowns for ridding you of the Prince of Mantua, give them me, and don't pay my debts. A gentleman without debts could not show his face anywhere. It never entered my mind to be out of debt.

Elsh. Very well, you shall have them; but take the keys of my garden. The day you are weary of being hunted by your creditors, come and hide among the corn-flowers, where I found you this morning. Be careful to bring your wig and your motley coat. Never appear before me without this counterfeit figure and these silver bells, for it was so you won my favour. You shall turn into my jester again for such time as shall please you, and then you shall go about your business. Now you may be off; the door is open.

Gov. Is it possible that the Prince of Mantua should be gone without my seeing him!

END OF FANTASIO.

NO TRIFLING WITH LOVE

(ON NE BADINE PAS AVEC L'AMOUR).

COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

(PUBLISHED IN 1834; ACTED IN 1861.)

Dramatis Personæ.



THE BARON.

PERDICAN (*his son*).

MASTER BLAZIUS (*Perdican's tutor*).

MASTER BRIDAINÉ (*parish priest*).

CAMILLE (*the Baron's niece*).

DAME PLUCHE (*her governess*).

ROSETTE (*foster-sister of Camille*).

Peasants, Servants, etc.

NO TRIFLING WITH LOVE.

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.—*A Village Green before the Chateau.*

The Chorus. Gently rocked on his prancing mule, Master Blazius advances through the blossoming corn-flowers; his clothes are new, his writing-case hangs by his side. Like a chubby baby on a pillow, he rolls about on top of his protuberant belly, and with his eyes half shut mumbles a paternoster into his double chin. Welcome, Master Blazius; you come for the vintage time in the semblance of an ancient amphora.

Master Blazius. Let those who wish to learn an important piece of news first of all bring me here a glass of new wine.

Chorus. Here is our biggest bowl: drink, Master Blazius; the wine is good; you shall speak afterwards.

Blaz. You are to know, my children, that young Per-dican, our seigneur's son, has just attained his majority,

and that he has taken his doctor's degree at Paris. This very day he comes home to the chateau with his mouth full of such fine flowery phrases, that three-quarters of the time you don't know how to answer him. His charming person is just all one golden book; he cannot see a blade of grass on the ground without giving you the Latin name for it; and when it blows or when it rains he tells you plainly the reason why. You will open your eyes as wide as the gate there to see him unroll one of the scrolls he has illuminated in ink of all colours, all with his own hands, and not a word said to anybody. In short, he is a polished diamond from top to toe, and that is the message I am bringing to my lord the baron. You perceive that does some credit to me, who have been his tutor since he was four years old; so now, my good friends, bring a chair and let me just get off this mule without breaking my neck; the beast is a trifle restive, and I should not be sorry to drink another drop before going in.

Chorus. Drink, Master Blazius, and recover your wits. We saw little Perdican born, and once you said, he is coming, we did not need to hear such a long story about him. May we find the child in the grown man's heart!

Blaz. On my word the bowl is empty; I did not think I had drunk it all. Good-bye! As I trotted along the road I got ready two or three unpretending phrases that will please my lord; I will go and pull the bell.

(Exit.)

Chorus. Sorely jolted on her panting ass, Dame Pluche

mounts the hill. Her frightened groom belabours the poor animal with all his might, while it shakes its head with a thistle in its jaws. Her long lean legs jerk with anger, whilst her bony hands string off her beads. Good-day to you, Dame Pluche; you come like the fever with the wind that yellows the woods.

Dame Pluche. A glass of water, you rabble; a glass of water and a little vinegar.

Chorus. Where do you come from, Pluche, my darling? Your false hair is covered with dust; there's a wig spoilt; and your chaste gown is tucked up to your venerable garters.

Pluche. Know, boors, that the fair Camille, your master's niece, arrives at the chateau to-day. She left the convent by my lord's express orders to come and enter on possession of her mother's rich estate, in due time and place, as meet is to be done. Her education, thank God, is finished, and those who see her will have the fortune to inhale the fragrance of a glorious flower of goodness and piety. Never was there anything so pure, so lamblike, so dovelike, as that dear novice; the Lord God of heaven be her guide: Amen. Stand aside, you rabble; I fancy my legs are swollen.

Chorus. Smooth yourself down, honest Pluche, and when you pray to God ask for rain; our corn is as dry as your shanks.

Pluche. You have brought me water in a bowl that smells of the kitchen. Give me a hand to help me down. You are a pack of ill-mannered boobies. (*Exit.*)

Chorus. Let us put on our Sunday best, and wait till the Baron sends for us. Either I am greatly mistaken, or there is some jolly merry-making toward to-day.

SCENE II.

The Baron's Drawing-Room.

Enter the Baron, Master Bridaine, and Master Blazius.

The Baron. Master Bridaine, you are my friend: let me introduce Master Blazius, my son's tutor. My son yesterday, at eight minutes past twelve, noon, was exactly twenty-one years old. He has taken his degree, and passed in four subjects. Master Blazius, I introduce to you Master Bridaine, priest of the parish, and my friend.

Blaz. (bowing). Passed in four subjects, your lordship: literature, philosophy, Roman law, canon law.

Baron. Go to your room, my dear Blazius; my son will not be long in appearing. Arrange your dress a little, and return when the bell rings.

(Exit Master Blazius.)

Brid. Shall I tell you what I am thinking, my lord? Your son's tutor smells strong of wine.

Baron. It is impossible!

Brid. I am as sure as I am alive. He spoke to me very close just now. He smells fearfully of wine.

Baron. No more of this. I repeat, it is impossible.

(Enter Dame Pluche.)

There you are, good Dame Pluche ! My niece is with you, no doubt ?

Pluche. She is following me, my lord. I preceded her by a few steps.

Baron. Master Bridaine, you are my friend. I present to you Dame Pluche, my niece's governess. My niece, yesterday at seven o'clock P.M., attained the age of eighteen years. She is leaving the best convent in France. Dame Pluche, I present to you Master Bridaine, priest of the parish, and my friend.

Pluche (bowing). The best convent in France, my lord ; and, I may add, the best Christian in the convent.

Baron. Go, Dame Pluche, and repair the disorder you are in. My niece will be here shortly, I hope. Be ready at the dinner-hour.

(Exit Dame Pluche.)

Brid. That old lady seems full of unction.

Baron. Full of unction and compunction, Master Bridaine. Her virtue is unassailable.

Brid. But the tutor smells of wine. I am absolutely certain of it.

Baron. Master Bridaine, there are moments when I doubt your friendship. Are you setting yourself to contradict me ? Not a word more on that matter. I have formed the project of marrying my son to my niece. They are a couple made for one another. Their education has stood me in six thousand crowns.

Brid. It will be necessary to obtain a dispensation.

Baron. I have it, Bridaine ; it is in my study on my

table. Oh, my friend, let me tell you now that I am full of joy. You know I have always detested solitude. Nevertheless, the position I occupy and the seriousness of my character compel me to reside in this chateau for three months every summer and winter. It is impossible to ensure the happiness of men in general, and one's vassals in particular, without sometimes giving one's valet the stern order to admit no one. How austere and irksome is the statesman's retirement! and what pleasure may I not hope to find in mitigating, by the presence of my wedded children, the melancholy gloom to which I have been inevitably a prey since the king saw fit to appoint me collector!

Brid. Will the marriage be performed here or at Paris?

Baron. That is just what I expected, Bridaine. I was certain you would ask that. Well, then, my friend—what would you say if those very hands—yes, Bridaine, your own hands—don't look at them so deprecatingly—were destined solemnly to bless the happy realisation of my dearest dreams? Eh?

Brid. I am silent; gratitude seals my lips.

Baron. Look out of this window; don't you see my servants crowding to the gate. My two children are arriving at the same moment: it is the happiest combination. I have arranged things in such a way that all is foreseen; my niece will be introduced by this door on the left, my son by the door on the right. What do you say to that? It will be the greatest delight to me to see how they will address one another, and what they will say. Six thousand crowns is no trifle, there's no mistake about that. Besides,

the children loved each other tenderly from the cradle. Bridaine, I have an idea——

Brid. What?

Baron. During dinner, without seeming to mean anything by it—you understand, my friend?—while emptying some merry glass—you know Latin, Bridaine?

Brid. *Ita ædepol*, by Jove, I should think so.

Baron. I should be very pleased to see you put the lad through his paces—discreetly of course—before his cousin: that can't fail to produce a good effect. Make him speak a little Latin; not precisely during dinner, that would spoil our appetites, and as for me, I don't understand a word of it: but at dessert, do you see?

Brid. If you don't understand a word of it, my lord, probably your niece is in the same plight.

Baron. All the more reason. Would you have a woman admire what she understands? Where were you brought up, Bridaine? That is a lamentable piece of reasoning.

Brid. I don't know much about women; but it seems to me difficult to admire what one does not understand.

Baron. Ah, Bridaine, I know them; I know the charming indefinable creatures! Be convinced that they love to have dust in their eyes, and the faster one throws, the wider they strain them to catch more.

(Enter on one side Perdican, Camille on the other.)

Good-day, children; good-day, my dear Camille, and you, my dear Perdican: kiss me and kiss each other.

Perd. Good-day, father, and you, my darling sister. How delightful; how happy I am!

Cam. How do you do, father? and you, cousin?

Perd. How tall you are, Camille, and beautiful as the day!

Baron. When did you leave Paris, Perdican?

Perd. Wednesday, I think—or Tuesday. Why, you are transformed into a woman! So I am a man, am I? It seems only yesterday I saw you only so high.

Baron. You must both be tired; it is a long journey, and the day is hot.

Perd. Oh dear no! Look how pretty Camille is, father.

Baron. Come, Camille, give your cousin a kiss.

Cam. Pardon me.

Baron. A compliment is worth a kiss. Give her a kiss, Perdican.

Perd. If my cousin draws back when I hold out my hand, I will say to you in my turn: Pardon me. Love may steal a kiss, friendship never.

Cam. Neither friendship nor love should accept anything but what they can give back.

Baron (to Master Bridaine). This is an ill-omened beginning, eh?

Brid. (to the Baron). Too much modesty is a fault, no doubt; but marriage does away with a deal of scruples.

Baron (to Master Bridaine). I am shocked—I am hurt. That answer displeased me. Pardon me! Did you see that she made a show of crossing herself? Come here, and let me speak to you. It pains me to the last degree. This moment, that was to be so sweet, is wholly spoilt for

me. I am vexed, annoyed. The devil take it; it is a regular bad business.

Brid. Say a few words to them; look at them turning their backs on each other.

Baron. Well, children, what in the world are you thinking of? What are you doing there, Camille, in front of that tapestry?

Cam. (*looking at a picture*). That is a fine portrait, uncle. Is it not a great-aunt of ours?

Baron. Yes, my child, it is your great-grandmother—or, at least, your great-grandfather's sister; for the dear lady never contributed—except, I believe, in prayers—to the augmentation of the family. She was a pious woman, upon my honour.

Cam. Oh yes, a saint. She is my great-aunt Isabel. How that nun's dress becomes her!

Baron. And you, Perdican, what are you about before that flower-pot?

Perd. That's a charming flower, father. It is a *héliotrope*.

Baron. Are you joking? It is no bigger than a fly.

Perd. That little flower no bigger than a fly is worth having all the same.

Brid. No doubt the doctor is right. Ask him what sex or what class it belongs to, of what elements it consists, whence it gets its sap and its colour: he will throw you into ecstasies with a description of the phenomena of yonder sprig, from its root to its flower.

Perd. I don't know so much about it, your reverence. I think it smells good, that is all.

SCENE III.—*Before the Chateau.**Enter the Chorus.*

Chorus. Several things amuse me and excite my curiosity. Come, friends, sit down under this walnut tree. Two formidable eaters are this moment present at the chateau—Master Bridaine and Master Blazius. Have you not noticed this—that when two men, closely alike, equally fat, equally sottish, with the same vices and the same passions, come to a meeting by some chance, it follows of necessity that they shall either adore or abominate each other? For the same reason that opposites attract, that a tall lean man will like a short round one, that fair people court the dark, and *vice versâ*, I foresee a secret struggle between the tutor and the priest. Both are armed with equal impudence, each has a barrel for a belly; they are not only gluttons, but epicures; both will quarrel at table for quality as well as quantity. If the fish is small, what is to be done? And in any case a carp's tongue cannot be divided, and a carp cannot have two tongues.

Then both are chatterers; but if the worst should come to the worst, they can talk at once and neither listen to the other. Already Master Bridaine has wanted to put several pedantic questions to young Perdican, and the tutor scowled. It is distasteful to him that his pupil should appear to be examined by any one but himself. Again, one is as ignorant as the other. Again, they are priests, the pair of them: one will parade his benefice, the other

will plume himself on the tutorship. Master Blazius is the son's confessor, Master Bridaine the father's. I see them already, elbows on the table, cheeks inflamed, eyes starting out of their heads, shaking their double chins in a paroxysm of hatred. They eye each other from head to foot; they begin the battle with petty skirmishes; soon war is declared; shots are exchanged; volleys of pedantry cross in mid-air; and, to cap all, between them frets Dame Pluche, repulsing them on either side with her sharp-pointed elbows.

Now that dinner is over, the chateau gate is opened. The company are coming out; let us step aside out of the way.

(Exeunt. Enter the Baron and Dame Pluche.)

Baron. Venerable Pluche, I am pained.

Pluche. Is it possible, my lord?

Baron. Yes, Pluche, possible. I had calculated for a long time past—I had even set it down in black and white on my tablets—that this day was to be the most enjoyable of my life. Yes, my good madam, the most enjoyable. You are not unaware that my plan was to marry my son to my niece. It was decided, arranged—I had mentioned it to Bridaine—and I see, I fancy I see, that these children speak to each other with coolness; they have not said a word to each other.

Pluche. There they come, my lord. Are they advised of your projects?

Baron. I dropped a few hints to each of them in private. I think it would be well, since they are thrown

together now, that we should sit down under this propitious shade and leave them to themselves for a moment.

(He withdraws with Dame Pluche. Enter Camille and Perdican.)

Perd. Do you know, Camille, it was not a bit nice of you to refuse me a kiss?

Cam. I am always like that; it is my way.

Perd. Will you take my arm for a stroll in the village?

Cam. No, I'm tired.

Perd. Would it not please you to see the meadow again? Do you remember our boating excursions? Come, we will go down as far as the mill; I'll take the oars, and you the tiller.

Cam. I don't feel the least inclined for it.

Perd. You cut me to the heart. What! not one remembrance, Camille? Not a heart-throb for our childhood, for all those kind, sweet past days, so full of delightful sillinesses? You won't come and see the path we used to go by to the farm?

Cam. No, not this evening.

Perd. Not this evening! but when? Our whole life lies there.

Cam. I am not young enough to amuse myself with my dolls, nor old enough to love the past.

Perd. What do you mean by that?

Cam. I mean that recollections of childhood are not to my taste.

Perd. They bore you?

Cam. Yes, they bore me.

Perd. Poor child; I am sincerely sorry for you.

(Exit in opposite directions.)

Baron (entering with Dame Pluche). You see and you hear, my excellent Pluche. I expected the softest harmony; and I feel as if I were attending a concert where the violin is playing "My heart it sighs," while the flute plays "Long live King Henry." Think of the frightful discord such a combination would produce! Yet that is what is going on in my heart.

Pluche. I must admit it is impossible for me to blame Camille, and to my mind nothing is in worse taste than boating excursions.

Baron. Are you serious?

Pluche. My lord, a young lady who respects herself does not risk herself on pieces of water.

Baron. But remark, pray Dame Pluche, that her cousin is to marry her, and that thenceforward——

Pluche. The proprieties forbid steering; and it is indelicate to leave *terra-firma* alone with a young man.

Baron. But I repeat—I tell you——

Pluche. That is my opinion——

Baron. Are you mad? Really you would make me say—— There are certain expressions that I do not choose—that are repugnant to me. You make me want—— Really, if I did not control myself—— Pluche, you are a dolt—I don't know what to think of you.

(Exit.)

SCENE IV.—*A village green.**The Chorus. Perdican.**Perd.* Good-day, friends ; do you know me ?*Chorus.* My lord, you are like a child we loved dearly.*Perd.* Was it not you who took me on your back to cross the streams of your meadows, who danced me on your knees, who took me up behind you on your sturdy horses, who crowded closer sometimes round your tables to make room for me at the farm supper ?*Chorus.* We remember, my lord. You were certainly the naughtiest rogue and the finest boy on earth.*Perd.* Why do you not kiss me then, instead of saluting me like a stranger ?*Chorus.* God bless you, child of our hearts. Each of us would like to take you in his arms ; but we are old, my lord, and you are a man.*Perd.* Yes, it is ten years since I saw you ; and in a single day all beneath the sun changes. I have grown some feet towards heaven ; you have bowed some inches towards the grave. Your heads have whitened, your steps grown slower ; you can no longer lift from the ground your child of long ago. So it is my turn now to be your father—father of you who were fathers to me.*Chorus.* Your return is a happier day than your birth. It is sweeter to recover what we love than to embrace a new-born babe.*Perd.* So this is my dear valley : my walnut trees, my

green paths, my little fountain. Here are my past days still full of life; here is the mysterious world of my childhood's dreams. Home, ah home!—incomprehensible word. Can man be born just for a single corner of the earth, there to build his nest, and there to live his day.

Chorus. We hear you are a learned man, my lord.

Perd. Yes, I hear that too. Knowledge is a fine thing, lads. These trees and this meadow find a voice to teach the finest knowledge of all—how to forget what one knows.

Chorus. There has been many a change during your absence. Girls are married, boys are gone to the army.

Perd. You shall tell me all about it. I expect a deal of news; but to tell the truth, I don't care to hear it yet. How small this pool is; formerly it seemed immense. I had carried away an ocean and forests in my mind: I come back to find a drop of water and blades of grass. But who can that girl be, singing at her lattice behind those trees?

Chorus. It is Rosette, your cousin Camille's foster-sister.

Perd. (*stepping forward*). Come down quick, Rosette, and come here.

Rosette (*entering*). Yes, my lord.

Perd. You saw me from your window, and you did not come, you wicked girl! Give me that hand of yours, quick now, and those cheeks to be kissed.

Ros. Yes, my lord.

Perd. Are you married, little one? They told me so.

Ros. Oh, no!

Perd. Why? There isn't a prettier girl than you in the village. We'll find you a match, child.

Chorus. My lord, she wants to die a maid.

Perd. Is that true, Rosette?

Ros. Oh, no!

Perd. Your sister Camille is come! Have you seen her?

Ros. She has not come this way yet.

Perd. Be off quick, and put on your new dress, and come to supper at the chateau.

SCENE V.—*A large room.*

Enter the Baron and Master Blazius.

Blaz. A word in your ear, my lord. The priest of your parish is a drunkard.

Baron. Shame! it is impossible.

Blaz. I am certain of it. He drank three bottles of wine at dinner.

Baron. That is excessive.

Blaz. And on leaving table he trampled on the flower-beds.

Baron. On the beds. You confound me. This is very strange. Drink three bottles of wine at dinner and trample on the flower-beds. Incomprehensible! And why did he not keep to the path?

Blaz. Because he walked crooked.

Baron (aside). I begin to think Bridaine was right. This fellow Blazius smells shockingly of wine.

Blaz. Besides, he ate enormously; his utterance was thick.

Baron. Indeed I remarked that myself.

Blaz. He delivered himself of a few Latin phrases; they were so many blunders. My lord, he is a depraved character.

Baron (aside). Ugh! The odour of this fellow Blazius is past bearing. Understand, Mr. Tutor, that I am engaged with something very different from this, and that I don't concern myself with what is eaten or what is drunk here. I am not a major-domo.

Blaz. Please God, I will never displease you, my lord. Your wine is good.

Baron. There is good wine in my cellars.

(Enter Master Bridaine.)

Brid. My lord, your son is out there on the green with all the ragamuffins of the village at his heels.

Baron. It is impossible.

Brid. I saw it with my own eyes. He was picking up pebbles to make ducks and drakes.

Baron. Ducks and drakes! My brain begins to reel. Here are all my ideas turning upside down. Bridaine, the report you bring me is absurd. It is unheard of that a Doctor of Laws should make ducks and drakes.

Brid. Go to the window, my lord; you will see with your own eyes.

Baron (aside). Good heavens! Blazius was right. Bridaine walks crooked.

Brid. Look, my lord, there he is beside the pond. He has his arm round a peasant girl.

Baron. A peasant girl! Does my son come here to debauch my vassals? His arm round a peasant! and all the brats in the village round. I feel myself taking leave of my senses.

Brid. That calls for retribution.

Baron. All is lost—irretrievably lost. I am lost. Bridaine staggers, Blazius reeks of wine, and my son seduces all the girls in the village while playing ducks and drakes.

(Exit.)

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.—*A Garden.*

Enter Master Blazius and Perdican.

Blaz. My lord, your father is in despair.

Perd. Why so?

Blaz. You are aware that he had formed a plan of uniting you to your cousin Camille.

Perd. Well, I ask no better!

Blaz. Nevertheless, the Baron thinks he perceives an incompatibility in your characters.

Perd. That is unlucky. I can't remodel mine.

Blaz. Will you allow this to make the match impossible?

Perd. I tell you once more I ask no better than to marry Camille. Go and find the Baron and tell him so.

Blaz. My lord, I withdraw; here comes your cousin.

(Exit. Enter Camille.)

Perd. Up already, cousin? I stick to what I said yesterday; you are ever so pretty!

Cam. Let us be serious, Perdican. Your father wants to make a match between us. I don't know what you

think of it, but I consider it right to forewarn you that I have made up my mind on the matter.

Perd. The worse for me, if you dislike me.

Cam. No more than any one else; I don't intend to marry. There is nothing in that to wound your pride!

Perd. I don't deal in pride: I care for neither its joys nor its pains.

Cam. I came here to enter on possession of my mother's property; to-morrow I go back to my convent.

Perd. Well, you play fair. Shake hands and let us be good friends!

Cam. I don't like demonstrations.

Perd. (*taking her hand*). Give me your hand, Camille, I beg of you. What do you fear of me? You don't choose that we should be married. Very well! don't let us marry. Is that a reason for hating one another? Are we not brother and sister? When your mother enjoined this marriage in her will, she wished that our friendship should be unending, that is all she wished. Why marry? there is your hand, there is mine, and to keep them united thus to our last sigh, do you think we need a priest? We need none but God.

Cam. I am very glad my refusal leaves you unconcerned.

Perd. I am not unconcerned, Camille. Your love would have given me life, but your friendship shall console me for the lack of it. Don't leave the chateau to-morrow. Yesterday you refused to stroll round the garden with me, because you saw in me a husband you would not accept.

Stay here a few days ; let me hope that our past life is not dead for ever in your heart.

Cam. I am bound to leave.

Perd. Why ?

Cam. That is my secret.

Perd. Do you love another ?

Cam. No ; but I will go.

Ferd. Is it irrevocable ?

Cam. Yes, irrevocable.

Perd. Well ! adieu. I should have liked to sit with you under the chestnuts in the little wood, and chat like kind friends for an hour or two. But if you don't care for that, let us say no more. Good-bye, my child.

(*Exit. Enter Dame Pluche.*)

Cam. Is all ready, Dame Pluche ? Shall we start to-morrow ? Has my guardian finished his accounts ?

Pluche. Yes, dear unspotted dove. The Baron called me dolt yesterday, and I am delighted to go.

Cam. Stay ; here is a line you will take to Lord Perdican, before dinner, from me.

Pluche. O Lord of heaven ! is it possible ? You writing a note to a man——

Cam. Am I not to be his wife ? Surely I may write to my fiancé.

Pluche. Lord Perdican has just left this spot. What can you have to write ? Your fiancé ; heaven have pity on us ! Can it be true that you are forgetting Jesus ?

Cam. Do what I tell you, and make all ready for my departure. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

The dining-room; servants laying the table.

Enter Master Bridaine.

Brid. Yes, it is a certainty, they will give him the place of honour again to-day. This chair on the Baron's right that I have filled so long will be the tutor's prize. Wretch that I am! A mechanical ass, a brazen drunkard gets me banished to the lower end of the table. The butler will pour for him the first glass of malaga, and when the dishes reach me they will be half cold; all the tit-bits will be gobbled up; not a cabbage nor a carrot left round the partridges. Holy Catholic Church! To give him that place yesterday—well that was intelligible. He had just arrived, and was sitting down to that table for the first time since many a long year. Heavens, how he guzzled! No, he will leave me nothing but bones and chicken's claws. I will not endure this affront. Farewell, venerable arm-chair in which many and many a time I have thrown myself back stuffed with juicy dishes! Farewell, sealed bottles; farewell matchless savour of venison done to a turn! Farewell, splendid board, noble dining-hall; I shall say grace here no longer. I return to my vicarage; they shall not see me confounded among the mob of guests; and, like Cæsar, I will rather be first in the village than second in Rome.

SCENE III.—*A field in front of a cottage.*

Enter Rosette and Perdican.

Perd. Since your mother is out, come for a bit of a walk.

Ros. Do you think all these kisses do me any good?

Perd. What harm do you see in them? I would kiss you before your mother. Are you not Camille's sister? Am I not your brother just as I am hers?

Ros. Words are words, and kisses are kisses. I am no better than a fool, and I find it out too, as soon as I have something to say. Fine ladies know what it means if you kiss their right hand, or if you kiss the left. Their fathers kiss them on the forehead; their mothers on the cheeks; and their lovers on the lips. Now everybody kisses me on both cheeks, and that vexes me.

Perd. How pretty you are, child!

Ros. All the same, you must not be angry with me for that. How sad you seem this morning! So your marriage is broken off?

Perd. The peasants of your village remember they loved me; the dogs in the poultry yard and the trees in the wood remember it too; but Camille does not remember. And your marriage, Rosette—when is it to be?

Ros. Don't let us talk of that, if you please? Talk of the weather, of the flowers here, of your horses, of my caps.

Perd. Of whatever you please, of whatever can cross your lips without robbing them of that heavenly smile.

(*He kisses her.*)

Ros. You respect my smile, but you don't spare my lips much, it seems to me. Why, do look; there is a drop of rain fallen on my hand, and yet the sky is clear.

Perd. Forgive me.

Ros. What have I done to make you weep?

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV.—*The Chateau.*

Enter Master Blazius and the Baron.

Blaz. My lord, I have a strange thing to tell you. A few minutes ago I chanced to be in the pantry—I mean in the gallery; what should I be doing in the pantry? Well, I was in the gallery. I had happened to find a decanter—I mean a jug of water. How was I to find a decanter in the gallery? Well, I was just drinking a drop of wine—I mean a glass of water—to pass the time, and I was looking out of the window between two flower vases that seemed to me to be in a modern style, though they are copied from the Etruscan.

Baron. What an intolerable manner of talking you have adopted, Blazius! Your speeches are inexplicable.

Blaz. Listen to me, my lord; lend me a moment's attention. Well, I was looking out of the window. In heaven's name, don't grow impatient. It concerns the honour of the family.

Baron. The family! This is incomprehensible. The honour of the family, Blazius? Do you know there are thirty-seven males of us, and nearly as many females, in Paris and in the country?

Blaz. Allow me to continue. Whilst I was drinking a drop of wine—I mean a glass of water—to hasten tardy digestion, would you believe I saw Dame Pluche passing under the window out of breath?

Baron. Why out of breath, Blazius? That is unwonted.

Blaz. And beside her, red with anger, your niece Camille.

Baron. Who red with anger—my niece or Dame Pluche?

Blaz. Your niece, my lord.

Baron. My niece red with anger? It is unheard of! And how do you know it was with anger? She might have been red for a thousand reasons. No doubt she had been chasing butterflies in my flower-garden.

Blaz. I can't be positive about that—that may be; but she was exclaiming with vigour, "Go! Find him. Do as you are bid! You are a fool! I will have it!" And she rapped with her fan the elbow of Dame Pluche, who gave a jump in the clover at each exclamation.

Baron. In the clover! And what did the governess reply to my niece's vagaries; for such conduct merits that description.

Blaz. The governess replied: "I will not go! I did not find him. He is making love to the villagers, to goose girls. I am too old to begin to carry love-letters. Thank

God, I have kept my hands clean up till now." And while she spoke she was crumpling up in her fingers a scrap of paper folded in four.

Baron. I don't understand at all; my ideas are becoming totally confused. What reason could Dame Pluche have for crumpling a paper folded in four, while she gave jumps in the clover? I cannot lend credence to such enormities.

Blaz. Don't you clearly understand, my lord, what that indicated?

Baron. No, upon my honour, my friend; no, I don't understand a word of it, good or bad. All this seems to be a piece of ill-regulated conduct, but equally devoid of motive and excuse.

Blaz. It means that your niece has a clandestine correspondence.

Baron. What are you saying? Do you reflect who you are speaking of? Weigh your words, Abbé!

Blaz. I might weigh them in the heavenly scales that are to weigh my soul at the last judgment, without finding a single syllable of them that does not ring true. Your niece has a clandestine correspondence.

Baron. But reflect, my friend, that it is impossible.

Blaz. Why should she have entrusted a letter to her governess? Why should she have exclaimed, "Find him!" while the other sulked and petted?

Baron. And to whom was this letter addressed?

Blaz. That is exactly the question—the *hic jacet lepus*. To whom was this letter addressed? To a man who is

making love to a goose girl. Now a man who publicly courts a goose girl may be evidently suspected of being himself born to herd geese. Nevertheless, it is impossible that your niece, with the education she has received, should be captivated by such a man. That is what I tell you, and that is why, saving your presence, I don't understand a word of it any more than you.

Baron. Good heavens! My niece declared to me this morning that she refused her cousin Perdican's hand. Can she be in love with a goose-herd? Step into my study. Since yesterday I have experienced such violent shocks that I cannot collect my ideas.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE V.—*A fountain in a wood.*

Enter Perdican, reading a note.

Perd. "Be at the little fountain at noon." What does that mean? Such coldness; so positive and cruel a refusal; such unfeeling pride; and, to crown all, a rendezvous. If it is to talk business, why choose such a spot? Is it a piece of coquetry? This morning, as I walked with Rosette, I heard a stir in the brushwood. I thought it was a doe's tread. Is there some plot in this?

(Enter Camille.)

Cam. Good day, cousin. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that you left me sadly this morning. You took my hand in spite of me. I come to ask you to give me yours. I refused you a kiss—here it is for you. *(Kissing him.)*

Now then, you said you would like to have a friendly chat with me. Sit down then, and let us talk. (*She sits down.*)

Perd. Was it a dream, or do I dream again now?

Cam. You thought it odd to get a note from me, did you not? I am changeable; but you said one thing this morning that was very true: "Since we part, let us part good friends." You do not know the reason of my leaving, and I am come here to tell it you. I am going to take the veil.

Perd. Is it possible? Is it you, Camille, that I see reflected in this fountain, sitting on the daisies, as in the old days?

Cam. Yes, Perdican, it is I. I am come to live over again one half-hour of the past life. I seemed to you rude and haughty. That is easily understood; I have renounced the world. Yet, before I leave it, I should like to hear your opinion. Do you think I am right to turn nun?

Perd. Don't question me on the subject, for I shall never turn monk.

Cam. In the ten years almost that we have lived separated from each other you have begun the experience of life. I know the man you are; and a heart and brain like yours must have learnt much in a little while. Tell me, have you had mistresses?

Perd. Why so?

Cam. Answer me, I beg of you, without bashfulness and without affectation.

Perd. I have had.

Cam. Did you love them?

Perd. With all my heart.

Cam. Where are they now? Do you know?

Perd. These are odd questions, upon my word. What would you have me say? I am neither their husband nor their brother. They went where it pleased them.

Cam. There must needs have been one you preferred to all others. How long did you love the one you loved best?

Perd. You're a queer girl. Do you want to turn father confessor?

Cam. I ask of you as a favour to answer me sincerely. You are far from a libertine, and I believe that your heart is honest. You must have inspired love, for you are worth it; and you would not have abandoned yourself to a whim. Answer me, I beg.

Perd. On my honour, I don't remember.

Cam. Do you know a man who has loved only one woman?

Perd. There are such, certainly.

Cam. Is he one of your friends? Tell me his name.

Perd. I have no name to tell you; but I believe there are men capable of loving once, and once only.

Cam. How often can an honourable man love?

Perd. Do you want to make me repeat a litany, or are you repeating a catechism yourself?

Cam. I want to get information, and to learn whether I do right or wrong to take the veil. If I married you, would you not be bound to answer all my questions frankly,

and lay your heart bare for me to see? I have a great regard for you, and I count you superior by nature and education to many other men. I am sorry you have forgotten the things I question you about. Perhaps if I knew you better I should grow bolder.

Perd. What are you driving at? Go on. I will answer.

Cam. Answer my first question then. Am I right to stay in the convent?

Perd. No!

Cam. Then I should do better to marry you?

Perd. Yes.

Cam. If the priest of your parish breathed on a glass of water, and told you it was a glass of wine, would you drink it as such?

Perd. No!

Cam. If the priest of your parish breathed on you, and told me that you would love all your life, should I do right to believe him?

Perd. Yes, and no.

Cam. What would you advise me to do the day I saw you loved me no longer?

Perd. To take a lover.

Cam. What shall I do next the day my lover loves me no longer?

Perd. Take another.

Cam. How long will that go on?

Perd. Till your hairs are grey, and then mine will be white.

Cam. Do you know what the cloisters are, Perdican? Did you ever sit a whole day long on the bench of a nunnery?

Perd. Yes, I have.

Cam. I have for friend a sister, thirty years old, who at fifteen had an income of five hundred thousand crowns. She is the most beautiful and the noblest creature that ever walked on earth. She was a peeress of the parliament, and had for husband one of the most distinguished men in France. Not one of the faculties that ennoble humanity had been left uncultivated in her, and like a sapling of some choice stock all her buds had branched. Love and happiness will never set their crown of flowers on a fairer forehead. Her husband deceived her; she loved another man, and she is dying of despair.

Perd. That is possible.

Cam. We share the same cell, and I have passed whole nights in talking of her sorrows. They have almost become mine: that is strange, is it not? I don't quite know how it comes to pass. When she spoke to me of her marriage, when she painted the intoxication of the first days, and then the tranquillity of the rest, and how at last the whole had taken wings and flown; how in the evening she sat down at the chimney corner, and he by the window, without a word said between them; how their love had languished, and how every effort to draw close again only ended in quarrels; how little by little a strange figure came and placed itself between them, and glided in amid their sufferings; it was still myself that I saw acting while she

spoke. When she said, "There I was happy," my heart leapt; when she added, "There I wept," my tears flowed. But fancy a thing stranger still. I ended by creating an imaginary life for myself. It lasted four years. It is needless to tell by how many reflected lights, how many doublings on myself all this came about. What I wanted to tell you as a curiosity is that all Louise's tales, all the phantoms of my dreams, bore your likeness.

Perd. My likeness—mine?

Cam. Yes—and that is natural; you were the only man I had known. In all truth I loved you, Perdican.

Perd. How old are you, Camille?

Cam. Eighteen.

Perd. Go on, go on; I am listening.

Cam. There are two hundred women in our convent. A small number of these women will never know life; all the rest are waiting for death. More than one of them left the convent as I leave it to-day, virgin and full of hopes. They returned after a little while old and blasted. Every day some of them die in our dormitories, and every day fresh ones come to take the place of the dead on the hair mattresses. Strangers who visit us admire the calm and order of the house; they look attentively at the whiteness of our veils; but they ask themselves why we lower them over our eyes. What do you think of these women, Perdican? Are they wrong or are they right?

Perd. I cannot tell.

Cam. There were some of them who counselled me to remain unmarried. I am glad to be able to consult

you. Do you believe these women would have done better to take a lover, and counsel me to do the same?

Perd. I cannot tell.

Cam. You promised to answer me.

Perd. I am absolved, as a matter of course, from the promise. I do not believe it is you who are speaking.

Cam. That may be; there must be great absurdities in all my ideas. It may well be that I have learnt by rote, that I am only an ill-taught parrot. In the gallery there is a little picture that represents a monk bending over a missal; through the gloomy bars of his cell slides a feeble ray of sunlight, and you catch sight of an Italian inn, in front of which dances a goatherd. Which of these two men has more of your esteem?

Perd. Neither one nor the other, and both. They are two men of flesh and blood; there is one that reads and one that dances; I see nothing else in it. You are right to turn nun.

Cam. A minute ago you told me no.

Perd. Did I say no? That is possible.

Cam. So you advise me to do it?

Perd. So you believe in nothing?

Cam. Lift your head, Perdican. Who is the man that believes in nothing?

Perd. (rising). Here is one: I do not believe in immortal life. My darling sister, the nuns have given you their experience, but believe me it is not yours; you will not die without loving.

Cam. I want to love, but I do not want to suffer. I

want to love with an undying love, and to swear vows that are not broken. Here is my lover.

(Showing her crucifix.)

Perd. That lover does not exclude others.

Cam. For me, at least, he shall exclude them. Do not smile, Perdican. It is ten years since I saw you, and I go to-morrow. In ten years more, if we meet again, we will again speak of this. I did not wish your memory to picture me as a cold statue; for lack of feeling leads to the point I have reached. Listen to me. Return to life; and so long as you are happy, so long as you love as men can love on earth, forget your sister Camille; but if ever it chances to you to be forgotten, or yourself to forget; if the angel of hope abandons you when you are alone, with emptiness in your heart, think of me, who shall be praying for you.

Perd. You are a proud creature; take care of yourself.

Cam. Why?

Perd. You are eighteen, and you do not believe in love.

Cam. Do you believe in it, you who speak to me? There you are, bending beside me knees that have worn themselves on the carpets of your mistresses, whose very names you forget. You have wept tears of joy and tears of despair; but you knew that the spring water was more constant than your tears, and would be always there to wash your swollen eyelids. You follow your vocation of young man, and you smile when one speaks to you of women's lives blasted; you do not believe that love can kill, since you have loved and live. What is the world then? It seems to me that you must cordially despise the women

who take you as you are, and who dismiss their last lover to draw you to their arms with another's kisses on their lips. A moment ago I was asking you if you had loved. You answered me like a traveller whom one might ask had he been in Italy or in Germany, and who should say, "Yes, I have been there;" then should think of going to Switzerland or the first country you may name. Is your love a coinage then, that it can pass like this from hand to hand till the day of death? No, not even a coin; for the tiniest gold piece is better than you, and whatever hand it may pass to, still keeps its stamp.

Perd. How beautiful you are, Camille, when your eyes grow bright!

Cam. Yes, I am beautiful; I know it. Compliment-mongers will teach me nothing new. The chill nun who cuts my hair off will perhaps turn pale at her work of mutilation; but it shall not change into rings and chains to go the round of the boudoirs. Not a strand of it shall be missing from my head when the steel passes there. I ask only one snap of the scissors, and when the consecrating priest draws on my finger the gold ring of my heavenly spouse, the tress of hair I give him may serve him for a cloak.

Perd. Upon my word, you are angry.

Cam. I did wrong to speak; my whole life is on my lips. Oh, Perdican, do not scoff; it is all deathly sad.

Perd. Poor child, I let you speak, and I have a good mind to answer you one word. You speak to me of a nun who appears to me to have a disastrous influence upon you. You say that she has been deceived, that she herself has

been false, and that she is in despair. Are you sure that if her husband or her lover came back, and stretched his hand to her through the grating of the convent parlour, she would not give him hers?

Cam. What do you say? I did not understand.

Perd. Are you sure that if her husband or her lover came, and bade her suffer again, she would answer, No?

Cam. I believe it.

Perd. There are two hundred women in your convent, and most of them have in the recesses of their hearts deep wounds. They have made you touch them, and they have dyed your maiden thoughts with drops of their blood. They have lived, have they not? and they have shown you shudderingly their life's road. You have crossed yourself before their scars as you would before the wounds of Jesus. They have made a place for you in their doleful processions, and you press closer to these fleshless bodies with a religious dread when you see a man pass. Are you sure that if the man passing were he who deceived them, he for whom they weep and suffer, he whom they curse as they pray to God—are you sure that at sight of him they would not burst their fetters to fly to their past misfortunes, and to press their bleeding breasts against the poniard that scarred them? Oh, child! do you know the dreams of these women who tell you not to dream? Do you know what name they murmur when the sighs issuing from their lips shake the sacramental host as it is offered to them? These women who sit down by you with swaying heads to pour into your ear the poison of their tarnished age, who clang

among the ruins of your youth the tocsin of their despair, and strike into your crimson blood the chill of their tombs, do you know who they are?

Cam. You frighten me. Anger is gaining upon you too.

Perd. Do you know what nuns are, unhappy girl? Do they, who represent to you men's love as a lie, know that there is a worse thing still—the lie of a divine love? Do they know that they commit a crime when they come whispering to a maiden woman's talk? Ah! how they have schooled you! How clearly I divined all this when you stopped before the portrait of our old aunt! You wanted to go without pressing my hand; you would not revisit this wood, nor this poor little fountain that looks at us bathed in tears; you were a renegade to the days of your childhood, and the mask of plaster the nuns have placed on your cheeks refused me a brother's kiss. But your heart beat; it forgot its lesson, for it has not learnt to read, and you returned to sit on this turf where now we are. Well, Camille, these women said well. They put you in the right path. It may cost me my life's happiness, but tell them from me—heaven is not for them.

Cam. Nor for me, is it?

Perd. Farewell, Camille. Return to your convent; and when they tell you one of their hideous stories that have poisoned your nature, give them the answer: All men are liars, fickle, chatterers, hypocrites, proud or cowardly, despicable, sensual; all women faithless, tricky, vain, inquisitive, and depraved. The world is only a bottomless cesspool, where the most shapeless sea-beasts climb and writhe on

mountains of slime. But there is in the world a thing holy and sublime—the union of two of these beings, imperfect and frightful as they are. One is often deceived in love, often wounded, often unhappy ; but one loves, and on the brink of the grave one turns to look back and says : I have suffered often, sometimes I have been mistaken, but I have loved. It is I who have lived, and not a spurious being bred of my pride and my sorrow.

(Exit.)

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.—*The front of the Chateau.**Enter the Baron and Master Blazius.*

Baron. Independently of your drunkenness, you are a worthless fellow, Master Blazius. My servants see you enter the pantry furtively; and when you are accused of having stolen my wine, in the most pitiable manner you think to justify yourself by accusing my niece of a clandestine correspondence.

Blaz. But, my lord, pray remember——

Baron. Leave the house, abbé, and never appear before me again. It is unreasonable to act as you do, and my self-respect constrains me never to pardon you as long as I live.

(Exit. Master Blazius follows. Enter Ferdican.)

Perd. I should like to know if I am in love. On the one hand, there is that fashion of questioning me, a trifle cavalier for a girl of eighteen. On the other, the ideas that these nuns have stuffed into her head will not be set right without trouble. Besides, she is to go to-day. Confound it! I love her; there's not a doubt of it. After all, who knows? Perhaps she was repeating a lesson;

and besides, it is clear she does not trouble her head about me. On the other hand again, her prettiness is all very well; but that does not alter the fact that she has much too decided a manner and too curt a tone. My only plan is to think no more of it. It is plain I don't love her. There is no doubt she is pretty; but why can I not put yesterday's talk out of my head? Upon my word, my wits were wandering all last night. Now where am I going? Ah, I am going to the village.

(Exit.)

SCENE II.—*A road.*

Enter Master Bridaine.

Brid. What are they doing now? Alas! there is twelve o'clock. They are at table. What are they eating? What are they not eating? I saw the cook cross the village with a huge turkey. The scullion carried the truffles, with a basket of grapes.

(Enter Master Blazius.)

Blaz. Oh, unforeseen disgrace! here I am turned out of the chateau, and, by consequence, from the dinner-table. I shall never drink the wine in the pantry again.

Brid. I shall never see the dishes smoke again. Never again before the blaze of that noble hearth shall I warm my capacious belly.

Blaz. Why did a fatal curiosity prompt me to listen to the conversation between Dame Pluche and the niece? Why did I report all I saw to the Baron?

Brid. Why did an idle pride remove me from that honourable dinner when I was so kindly welcomed? What mattered to me the seat on the right or seat on the left?

Blaz. Alas! I was tipsy, it must be admitted, when I committed this folly.

Brid. Alas! the wine had mounted to my head when I was guilty of this rashness.

Blaz. Yonder is the Vicar, I think.

Brid. It is the tutor in person.

Blaz. Oh! oh! Vicar, what are you doing here?

Brid. I? I am going to dinner. Are you not coming?

Blaz. Alas, Master Bridaine, intercede for me; the Baron has dismissed me. I falsely accused Miss Camille of having a clandestine correspondence; and yet, God is my witness that I saw, or thought I saw, Dame Pluche in the clover. I am ruined, Vicar.

Brid. What do you tell me?

Blaz. Alas! alas! the truth. I am in utter disgrace for stealing a bottle.

Brid. What has this talk of stolen bottles to do, sir, with a clover patch and correspondence?

Blaz. I entreat you to plead my cause. I am honourable, my Lord Bridaine. O worshipful Lord Bridaine, I am yours to command.

Brid. O fortune! is it a dream? Shall I then be seated on yon blessed chair?

Blaz. I shall be grateful to you would you hear my story and kindly excuse me, your worship, my dear Vicar.

Brid. That is impossible, sir; it has struck twelve, and I am off to dinner. If the Baron complains of you, that is your business. I don't intercede for a sot. (*Aside.*) Quick, fly to the gate: swell, my stomach.

(*Exit running.*)

Blaz. (alone). Wretched Pluche! it is you shall pay for them all; yes, it is you are the cause of my ruin, shameless woman, vile go-between, it is to you I owe my disgrace. Holy university of Paris! I am called sot! I am undone if I don't get hold of a letter, and if I don't prove to the Baron that his niece has a correspondence. I saw her writing at her desk this morning. Patience! here comes news! (*Pass Dame Pluche carrying a letter.*) Pluche, give me that letter.

Pluche. What is the meaning of this? It is a letter of my mistress's that I am going to post in the village.

Blaz. Give it to me, or you are a dead woman.

Pluche. I dead! Dead?

Blaz. Yes, dead, Pluche; give me that paper.

(*They fight. Enter Perdican.*)

Perd. What is this? What are you about, Blazius? Why are you molesting this woman?

Pluche. Give me back the letter. He took it from me, my lord. Justice!

Blaz. She is a go-between, my lord. That letter is a billet-doux.

Pluche. It is a letter of Camille's, my lord—your fiancée's.

Blaz. It is a billet-doux to a goose-herd.

Pluche. You lie, Abbé. Let me tell you that.

Perd. Give me that letter. I understand nothing about your quarrel; but as Camille's fiancé, I claim the right to read it. (*Reads.*) "To Sister Louise, at the Convent of ——." Leave me, Dame Pluche; you are a worthy woman, and Master Blazius is a fool. Go to dinner; I undertake to put this letter in the post.

(*Exeunt Master Blazius and Dame Pluche.*)

Perd. (alone). That it is a crime to open a letter I know too well to be guilty of it. What can Camille be saying to this sister? Am I in love after all? What empire has this strange girl gained over me that the line of writing on this address should make my hand shake? That's odd; Blazius in his struggle with Dame Pluche has burst the seal. Is it a crime to unfold it? No matter, I will put everything just as it was. (*Opens the letter and reads.*) "I am leaving to-day, my dear, and all has happened as I had foreseen. It is a terrible thing; but that poor young man has a dagger in his heart; he will never be consoled for having lost me. Yet I have done everything in the world to disgust him with me. God will pardon me for having reduced him to despair by my refusal. Alas! my dear, what could I do? Pray for me; we shall meet again to-morrow, and for ever. Yours with my whole soul—CAMILLE." Is it possible? that is how Camille writes! that is how she speaks of me! I in despair at her refusal! Oh! Good heavens, if that were true it would be easily seen; what shame could there be in loving? She does everything in the world, she says, to disgust me, and I have a dagger in my heart. What reason can she have

to invent such a romance? Is it then true—the thought that I had to-night? Oh women! This poor Camille has great piety perhaps. With a willing heart she gives herself to God, but she has resolved and decreed that she would leave me in despair. That was settled between the two friends before she left the convent. It was decided that Camille was going to see her cousin again, that they would wish her to marry him, that she would refuse, and that the cousin would be in despair. It is so interesting for a young girl to sacrifice to God the happiness of a cousin! No, no, Camille, I do not love you, I am not in despair, I have not a dagger in my heart, and I will prove it to you. Yes, before you leave this you shall know that I love another. Here, my good man! (*Enter a Peasant.*) Go to the chateau; tell them in the kitchen to send a servant to take this note to Mademoiselle Camille.

(*He writes.*)

Peasant. Yes, my lord.

(*He goes out.*)

Perd. Now for the other. Ah! I am in despair. Here! Rosette, Rosette!

(*He knocks at a door.*)

Ros. (*opening it*). Is it you, my lord? Come in, my mother is here.

Perd. Put on your prettiest cap, Rosette, and come with me.

Ros. Where?

Perd. I will tell you. Ask leave of your mother, but make haste.

Ros. Yes, my lord.

(She goes into the house.)

Perd. I have asked Camille for another rendezvous, and I am sure she will come; but, by heaven, she will not find what she expects there. I mean to make love to Rosette before Camille herself.

SCENE III.—*The little wood.*

Enter Camille and the Peasant.

Peas. I'm going to the chateau with a letter for you, miss. Must I give it to you, or must I leave it in the kitchen, as Lord Perdican told me?

Cam. Give it me.

Peas. If you would rather I took it to the chateau, it isn't worth while waiting here.

Cam. Give it me, I tell you.

Peas. As you please. *(Gives the letter.)*

Cam. Stop. There's for your trouble.

Peas. Much obliged. I may go, mayn't I?

Cam. If you like.

Peas. I am going, I am going.

(Exit.)

Cam. (reading). Perdican asks me to say good-bye to him before leaving, near the little fountain where I brought him yesterday. What can he have to say to me? Why, here is the fountain, and I am on the spot. Ought I to grant this second rendezvous? Ah! *(Hides behind a tree.)* There is Perdican coming this way with my foster-sister. I

suppose he will leave her. I am glad that I shan't seem to be the first to arrive.

(Enter Perdican and Rosette, and sit down.)

Cam. (hidden, aside). What is the meaning of this? He is making her sit down beside him. Does he ask me for a rendezvous to come there and talk with another girl? I am curious to know what he says to her.

Perd. (aloud, so that Camille hears). I love you, Rosette. You alone, out of all the world, have forgotten nothing of our good days that are past. You are the only one who remembers the life that is no more. Share my new life. Give me your heart, sweet child. There is the pledge of our love.

(Putting his chain on her neck.)

Ros. Are you giving me your gold chain?

Perd. Now look at this ring. Stand up and let us come near the fountain. Do you see us both in the spring leaning on each other? Do you see your lovely eyes near mine, your hand in mine? Watch how all that is blotted out. *(Throwing his ring into the water.)* Look how our image has disappeared. There it is coming back little by little. The troubled water regains its tranquillity. It trembles still. Great black rings float over its surface. Patience. We are reappearing. Already I can make out again your arms entwined in mine. One minute more and there will not be a wrinkle left in your pretty face. Look! It was a ring that Camille gave me.

Cam. (aside). He has thrown my ring into the water.

Perd. Do you know what love is, Rosette? Listen! the wind is hushed; the morning rain runs pearly over the parched leaves that the sun revives. By the light of heaven, by this sun we see, I love you! You will have me, will you not? No one has tarnished your youth! no one has distilled into your crimson blood the dregs of jaded veins! You do not want to turn nun? There you stand, young and fair, in a young man's arms. O Rosette, Rosette, do you know what love is?

Ros. Alas, Doctor, I will love you as best I can.

Perd. Yes, as best you can; and that will be better, doctor though I am, and peasant though you are, than these pale statues can love, fashioned by nuns, their heads where their hearts should be, who leave the cloisters to come and spread through life the dank atmosphere of their cells. You know nothing; you could not read in a book the prayer that your mother taught you as she learnt it from her mother. You do not even understand the sense of the words you repeat when you kneel at your bedside; but you understand that you are praying, and that is all God wants.

Ros. How you speak, my lord!

Perd. You cannot read; but you can tell what these woods and meadows say, their warm rivers and fair harvest-covered fields, and all this nature radiant with youth. You recognise all these thousands of brothers and me as one of them. Rise up; you shall be my wife, and together we shall strike root into the vital currents of the almighty world.

SCENE IV.

Enter the Chorus.

Chorus. Certainly there is something strange going on at the chateau. Camille has refused to marry Perdican. She is to return to the convent she came from. But I think his lordship, her cousin, has consoled himself with Rosette. Alas ! the poor girl does not know the risk she runs in listening to the speeches of a gallant young nobleman.

(Enter Dame Pluche.)

Pluche. Quick ! quick ! saddle my ass.

Chorus. Will you pass away like a beautiful dream, venerable lady ? Are you going to bestride anew so soon that poor beast who is so sad to bear your weight ?

Pluche. Thank God, my sweet rabble, I shall not die here !

Chorus. Die far from here, Pluche, my darling ; die unknown in some unwholesome cavern. We will pray for your worshipful resurrection.

Pluche. Here comes my mistress. *(To Camille, who enters.)* Dear Camille, all is ready for our start ; the Baron has rendered his account, and they have pack-saddled my ass.

Cam. Go to the devil, you and your ass too ! I shall not start to-day. *(Exit.)*

Chorus. What can this mean ? Dame Pluche is pale with anger ; her false hair tries to stand on end, her chest whistles, and her fingers stretch out convulsively.

Pluche. Lord God of heaven ! Camille swore ! *(Exit.)*

SCENE V.

Enter the Baron and Master Bridaine.

Brid. My lord, I must speak to you in private. Your son is making love to a village girl.

Baron. It is absurd, my friend.

Brid. I distinctly saw him passing in the heather with her on his arm. He was bending his head to her ear and promising to marry her.

Baron. This is monstrous.

Brid. You may be convinced of it. He made her a considerable present that the girl showed her mother.

Baron. Heavens, Bridaine, considerable? In what way considerable?

Brid. In weight and importance. It was the gold chain he used to wear in his cap.

Baron. Let us step into my study. I don't know what to think of it.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE VI.—*Camille's room.*

Enter Camille and Dame Pluche.

Cam. He took my letter, you say?

Pluche. Yes, my child; he undertook to put it in the post.

Cam. Go to the drawing-room, Dame Pluche, and do me the kindness to tell Perdican that I expect him here.
(Exit Dame Pluche.) He read my letter, that is a certainty.

His scene in the wood was a retaliation, like his love for Rosette. He wished to prove to me that he loved another girl, and to play at unconcern in spite of his vexation. Could he be in love with me by any chance? (*She lifts the tapestry.*) Are you there, Rosette?

Ros. (entering). Yes; may I come in?

Cam. Listen to me, my child. Is not Lord Perdican making love to you?

Ros. Alas! yes.

Cam. What do you think of what he said to you this morning?

Ros. This morning? Where?

Cam. Don't play the hypocrite. This morning at the fountain in the little wood.

Ros. You saw me there?

Cam. Poor innocent! No, I did not see you. He made you fine speeches, did he not? I would wager he promised to marry you.

Ros. How do you know that?

Cam. What matter how? I know it. Do you believe in his promises, Rosette?

Ros. Why, how could I help it? He deceive me? why should he?

Cam. Perdican will not marry you, my child.

Ros. Alas! I can't tell.

Cam. You are in love with him, poor girl. He will not marry you; and for proof, you shall have it. Go in again behind this curtain. You need only keep your ears open, and come when I call you. (*Exit Rosette.*)

Cam. (sol.). Can it be that I who thought I was doing an act of vengeance, am doing an act of humanity? The poor girl's heart is caught. (*Enter Perdican.*) Good morning, cousin; sit you down.

Perd. What a toilette, Camille? Whose scalp are you after?

Cam. Yours perhaps. I am sorry I could not come to the rendezvous you asked for; had you anything to say to me?

Perd. (aside). A good-sized fib that, on my life, for a spotless lamb. I saw her listening to the conversation behind a tree. (*Aloud.*) I have nothing to say to you but a farewell, Camille. I thought you were starting; yet your horse is in the stable, and you do not look as if you were dressed for travelling.

Cam. I like discussion. I am not very sure that I did not want to quarrel with you again.

Perd. What is the use in quarrelling when it is impossible to make it up? The pleasure of disputes is in making peace.

Cam. Are you convinced that I don't wish to make it?

Perd. Don't laugh at me; I am no match for you there.

Cam. I should like a flirtation. I don't know whether it is that I have a new dress on, but I want to amuse myself. You proposed going to the village; let us go. I'm ready; let us take the boat. I want to picnic on the grass, or to take a stroll in the forest. Will it be moonlight this evening? That's odd; you have not the ring I gave you on your finger.

Perd. I have lost it.

Cam. Then that is why I found it. There, Perdican; here it is for you.

Perd. Is it possible? Where did you find it?

Cam. You are looking to see if my hands are wet, are you not? Indeed, I spoilt my convent dress to get this little child's plaything out of the fountain. That is why I have put on another, and I tell you it has changed me. Come, put that on your finger.

Perd. You got this ring out of the water, Camille, at the risk of falling in yourself. Is this a dream? There it is. It is you who are putting it on my finger. Ah, Camille, why do you give it me back, this sad pledge of a happiness that exists no longer? Speak, coquette; speak, rash girl. Why do you go? Why do you stay? Why do you change aspect and colour from hour to hour, like the stone of this ring at every ray of the sun?

Cam. Do you know the heart of women, Perdican? Are you sure of their inconstancy? and do you know whether they really change in thought when they change in words sometimes? Some say no. Undoubtedly we often have to play a part, often lie. You see I am frank. But are you sure that the whole woman lies when her tongue lies? Have you reflected well on the nature of this weak and passionate being, on the sternness with which she is judged, and on the rules that are imposed on her? And who knows whether, forced by the world into deceit, this little brainless being's head may not take a pleasure in it, and lie sometimes for pastime or for folly, as she does for necessity?

Perd. I understand nothing of all this, and I never lie. I love you, Camille. That is all I know.

Cam. You say that you love me, and that you never lie——

Perd. Never.

Cam. Yet here is one who says that that sometimes happens to you. (*She raises the tapestry. Rosette is seen in the distance fainting on a chair.*) What answer will you make to this child, Perdican, when she demands an account of your words? If you never lie, how comes it then that she fainted on hearing you tell me that you love me? I leave you with her. Try to restore her.

(*She attempts to leave.*)

Perd. One moment, Camille. Listen to me.

Cam. What would you tell me? It is to Rosette you should speak. I do not love you. I did not go out of spite and fetch this unhappy child from the shelter of her cottage, to make a bait and a plaything of her. I did not rashly repeat before her burning words addressed to another woman. I did not feign to hurl to the winds for her sake the remembrance of a cherished friendship. I did not put my chain on her neck. I did not tell her I would marry her.

Perd. Listen to me, listen to me.

Cam. Did you not smile a moment ago when I told you I had not been able to go to the fountain? Well. Yes, I was there, and I heard all. But God is my witness, I would not care to have spoken as you spoke there. What will you do with that girl yonder, now when she comes

with your passionate kisses on her lips and shows you, weeping, the wound you have dealt her? You wished to be revenged on me—did you not?—and to punish me for a letter written to my convent. You wished to loose, at whatever cost, any shaft that could reach me, and you counted it as nothing to pierce this child with your poisoned arrow, provided it struck me behind her. I had boasted of having inspired some love in you, of leaving you some regret for me. So that wounded you in your noble pride! Well, learn it from my lips. You love me—do you hear?—but you will marry that girl, or you are nothing but a coward.

Perd. Yes, I will marry her.

Cam. And you will do well.

Perd. Right well, and far better than if I married you yourself. Why so hot, Camille? This child has fainted. We shall easily restore her. A flask of vinegar is all that needs. You wished to prove to me that I had lied once in my life. That is possible, but I think you are bold to determine at what moment. Come, help me to aid Rosette.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE VII.

The Baron and Camille.

Baron. If that takes place, I shall run mad.

Cam. Use your authority.

Baron. I shall run mad, and I shall refuse my consent, that's certain.

Cam. You ought to speak to him, and make him hear reason.

Baron. This will throw me into despair for the whole carnival, and I shall not appear once at court. It is a disproportioned marriage. Nobody ever heard of marrying one's cousin's foster-sister; that passes all kinds of bounds.

Cam. Send for him, and tell him flatly that you don't like the marriage. Believe me, it is a piece of madness, and he will not resist.

Baron. I shall be in black this winter, be assured of that.

Cam. But speak to him, in heaven's name. This is a freak of his; perhaps it is too late already; if he has spoken of it, he will carry it out.

Baron. I am going to shut myself up, that I may abandon myself to my sorrow. Tell him, if he asks for me, that I have shut myself up, and that I am abandoning myself to my sorrow at seeing him wed a nameless girl.

(Exit.)

Cam. Shall I not find a man of sense here? Upon my word, when you look for one, the solitude becomes appalling. *(Enter Perdican.)* Well, cousin, and when is the wedding to be?

Perd. As soon as possible; I have mentioned it already to the notary, the priest, and all the peasants.

Cam. You really think, then, that you will marry Rosette?

Perd. Assuredly.

Cam. What will your father say?

Perd. Whatever he pleases ; I choose to marry this girl ; it is an idea for which I am indebted to you, and I stand to it. Need I repeat to you the hackneyed common-places about my birth and hers ? She is young and pretty, and she loves me ; it is more than one needs to be trebly happy. Whether she have brains or no, I might have found worse. People will raise an outcry, and a laugh ; I wash my hands of them.

Cam. There is nothing laughable in it ; you do very well to marry her. But I am sorry for you on one account : people will say you married her out of spite.

Perd. You sorry for that ? Oh, no !

Cam. Yes, I am really sorry for it. It injures a young man to be unable to resist a moment's annoyance.

Perd. Be sorry then ; for my part, it's all one to me.

Cam. But you don't mean it ; she is nobody.

Perd. She will be somebody then, when she is my wife.

Cam. You will tire of her before the notary has put on his best coat and his shoes, to come here ; your gorge will rise at the wedding breakfast, and the evening of the ceremony you will have her hands and feet cut off, as they do in the "Arabian Nights," because she smells of *ragoût*.

Perd. No such thing, you will see. You do not know me. When a woman is gentle and affectionate, fresh, kind, and beautiful, I am capable of contenting myself with that ; yes, upon my word, even to the length of not caring to know if she speaks Latin.

Cam. It is a pity there was so much money spent on teaching it to you : it is three thousand crowns lost.

Perd. Yes; they would have done better to give it to the poor.

Cam. You will take charge of it, for the poor in spirit, at least.

Perd. And they will give me in exchange the kingdom of heaven, for it is their's.

Cam. How long will this sport last?

Perd. What sport?

Cam. Your marriage with Rosette.

Perd. A very little while: God has not made man a lasting piece of work: thirty or forty years at the most.

Cam. I look forward to dancing at your wedding.

Perd. Listen to me, Camille, this tone of raillery is out of season.

Cam. I like it too well to leave it.

Perd. Then I leave you, for I have enough of you for the moment.

Cam. Are you going to your bride's home?

Perd. Yes, this instant.

Cam. Give me your arm; I am going there too.

(Enter Rosette.)

Perd. Here you are, my child. Come, I want to present you to my father.

Ros. (kneeling down). My lord, I am come to ask a favour of you. All the village folk I spoke to this morning told me that you loved your cousin, and that you only made love to me to amuse both of you; I am laughed at as I pass, and I shall not be able to find a husband in the country, now that I have been the laughing-

stock of the neighbourhood. Allow me to give you the necklace you gave me, and to live in peace with my mother.

Cam. You are a good girl, Rosette ; keep the necklace. It is I who give it you, and my cousin will take mine in its place. As for a husband, don't trouble your head for that ; I undertake to find one for you.

Perd. Certainly there is no difficulty about that. Come, Rosette, come and let me take you to my father.

Cam. Why ? It is useless.

Perd. Yes, you are right ; my father would receive us ill ; we must let the first moment of his surprise pass by. Come with me ; we will go back to the green. A good joke indeed that it should be said I don't love you, when I am marrying you. By Jove, we will silence them.

(Exit with Rosette.)

Cam. What can be happening in me ? He takes her away with a very tranquil air. That is odd ; my head seems to be swimming. Could he marry her in good earnest ? Ho ! Dame Pluche, Dame Pluche ! Is no one here ? *(Enter a Footman.)* Run after Lord Perdican ; make haste, and tell him to come up here again, I want to speak to him. *(Exit Footman.)* What in the world is all this ? I can bear no more ; my feet refuse to support me.

(Re-enter Perdican.)

Perd. You asked for me, Camille.

Cam. No—no——

Perd. Truly you are pale ; what have you to say to me ? You recalled me to speak to me.

Cam. No—no—— O Lord God ! *(Exit.)*

LAST SCENE.

An Oratory.

Enter Camille. She throws herself at the foot of the altar.

Cam. Have you abandoned me, O my God? You know when I came here I had promised to be faithful to you. When I refused to become the bride of another than you, I thought I spoke in singleness of heart, before you and before my conscience. You know it, O my Father! Do not reject me now. Ah, why do you make truth itself a liar? Why am I so weak? Ah, unhappy girl that I am; I can pray no more!

(Enter Perdican.)

Perd. Pride, most fatal of men's counsellors, why didst thou come between this girl and me? Yonder is she, pale and affrighted, pressing on the unfeeling stone her heart and her face. She might have loved me. We were born for one another. Wherefore camest thou on our lips, O Pride, when our hands were about to join——?

Cam. Who followed me? Who speaks beneath this vault? Is it you, Perdican?

Ferd. Blind fools that we are; we love each other. What were we dreaming, Camille? What vain words, what wretched follies passed between us like a pestilent wind? Which wished to deceive the other? Alas, this life is in itself so sad a dream; why should we confound it further with fancies of our own? Oh, my God, happiness is a pearl so rare in this ocean of a world. Thou, Heavenly

Fisherman, hadst given it us ; 'Thou hadst fetched it for us from the depths of the abyss, this priceless jewel ; and we, like spoiled children that we are, made a plaything of it. The green path that led us towards each other sloped so gently, such flowery shrubs surrounded it, it merged in so calm a horizon—and vanity, light talking, and anger must cast their shapeless rocks on this celestial way, which would have brought us to thee in a kiss. We must do wrong, for we are of mankind. O blind fools ! We love each other—— !

Cam. Yes, we love each other, Perdican. Let me feel it on your heart. The God who looks down on us will not be offended. It is by His will that I love you. He has known it these fifteen years.

Perd. Dear one, you are mine.

(He kisses her. A great cry is heard from behind the altar.)

Cam. It is my foster-sister's voice.

Perd. How does she come here ? I had left her on the staircase when you sent to bring me back. She must have followed me unperceived.

Cam. Come out into the gallery ; the cry was from there.

Perd. What is this I feel ? I think my hands are covered with blood.

Cam. The poor child must have spied on us. She has fainted again. Come, let us bring her help. Alas ! it is all cruel——

Perd. No, truly, I will not go in. I feel a deadly chill that paralyses me. Go you, Camille, and try to restore her.

(*Exit Camille.*) I beseech of you, my God, do not make me a murderer. You see what is happening. We are two senseless children. We played with life and death, but our hearts are pure. Do not kill Rosette, O righteous God! I will find her a husband; I will repair my fault. She is young; she will be happy. Do not do that, O God! You may yet bless four of your children. (*Enter Camille.*) Well, Camille, what is it?

Cam. She is dead. Farewell, Perdican!

*A DOOR MUST BE EITHER
OPEN OR SHUT.*

PROVERB IN ONE ACT.

(PUBLISHED IN 1845 ; ACTED IN 1848.)

Dramatis Personæ.



THE COUNT.

|

THE MARQUISE.

Scene—Paris.

A DOOR MUST BE EITHER OPEN OR SHUT.



A PROVERB IN ONE ACT.



SCENE.—*Paris.*

(The Marquise is seated on a sofa near the fire embroidering. Enter the Count; he bows.)

Count. I don't know when I shall get over my stupidity, but my memory is shocking. I can't possibly take upon me to remember your day; and whenever I want to see you, it is sure to be a Tuesday.

Mar. Have you anything to say to me?

Count. No; but suppose I had, I could not say it. It is only a chance that you are by yourself, and within the next quarter of an hour you are sure to have a mob of intimate friends in here: they will put me to flight, I warn you.

Mar. It is true that to-day is my day, and I don't quite know why I have one. It's a fashion; but there is a reason for it all the same. Our mothers left their doors

open : good society was not numerous, and only meant for each circle a batch of bores that one accepted as a matter of duty. Nowadays, when you are at home, you are at home to all Paris ; and all Paris nowadays is in real earnest the whole of Paris, town and suburbs. When one is at home one's house is a street. A remedy had to be found, and, accordingly, everybody has their day. It is the only way to see as little as possible of each other, and when you say, "I am at home on Tuesdays," it is clearly just as if you said, "Leave me in peace on the other days——"

Count. That makes it all the worse for me to come to-day, since you allow me to see you in the week——

Mar. Make up your mind and sit down there. If you are in a good temper, you may talk ; if not, warm yourself. I don't expect a great many people to-day, and you shall watch the slides change in my little magic-lantern. But what's the matter with you ? You seem——

Count. What ?

Mar. I would not say the word for the world.

Count. Well, indeed, then I will admit it. Before I came in I was a little——

Mar. What ? It is my turn now to ask.

Count. Will you be angry if I tell you ?

Mar. There is a ball this evening, where I want to look my best, so I shall not lose my temper all day.

Count. Well, I was a little bored. I don't know what's the matter with me : it's a fashionable affliction like your days. I've been wretched since twelve o'clock, paid four

visits, and found no one in. I was to dine somewhere: excused myself without any reason. There is nothing to go to this evening. I went out in a bitter frost, saw nothing but red noses and blue cheeks. I don't know what to do. I am as stupid as a magazine article.

Mar. I can say the same for myself. I am bored to extinction. It is the weather, no doubt.

Count. The fact is, cold is abominable. Winter is an ailment. Fools see the pavement clean and the sky clear, and when a good sharp wind nips their ears they call that a fine frost. It is like talking of a fine inflammation of the lungs. Many thanks for fineries of that sort.

Mar. I go further than you. It seems to me that I get my dulness not so much from the air out of doors, cold though it is, as from the air other people breathe. Perhaps it is that we are growing old. I am beginning to be thirty, and I am losing my talent for existence.

Count. It is a talent I never had, and what scares me is that I am picking it up. As one ages, one turns fogey or fool, and I am desperately afraid of dying a wiseacre.

Mar. Ring for them to put a log on the fire. Your idea freezes me.

(A ring heard outside.)

Count. It is not worth while. There is a ring at the door, and your procession is arriving.

Mar. Let us see who will carry the flag; and, above all, do your best to stay.

Count. No; decidedly I am off.

Mar. Where are you going?

Count. I haven't an idea. (*He rises, bows, and opens the door.*) Adieu, Madame, till Thursday evening.

Mar. Why Thursday?

Count. Is it not your day at the opera? I will go and pay you a little visit.

Mar. I don't want you; you are too cross. Besides, I am taking M. Camus.

Count. M. Camus, your country neighbour?

Mar. Yes. He sold me apples and hay with great gallantry, and I want to return his civility.

Count. Now, that is just your way. The most wearisome creature! He should be fed on his own wares. And by the way, do you know what the world says?

Mar. No. But no one is coming. Who rang there?

Count (*looking out of window*). No one. A little girl, I think, with a band-box—something or other—a washer-woman. She is there in the court, talking to your servants.

Mar. You call that something or other! That's polite of you. It is my bonnet. Well, what are they saying about me and M. Camus? Do shut that door. There's a terrible draught.

Count. People are saying that you are thinking of marrying again, and that M. Camus is a millionaire, and that he comes very often to your house.

Mar. Really! Is that all? And you tell me that to my face?

Count. I tell it you because people are talking of it.

Mar. That is a pretty reason. Do I repeat to you all the world says of you?

Count. Of me, Madame? What do they say, if you please, that will not bear repeating?

Mar. But you see, anything will bear repeating, since you tell me that I am on the eve of being announced as Madame Camus. The story about you is at least as serious, for, unfortunately, it appears that it is true.

Count. What can it be? You frighten me.

Mar. One more proof that the world is right.

Count. Explain yourself, I beg.

Mar. Oh, on no account. It is your own affair——

Count (*sitting down again*). I implore you, Marquise. I ask it as a favour. You are the person in all the world whose opinion I value most.

Mar. One of the persons, you mean.

Count. No, Madame, I say the person—she whose esteem, whose opinion——

Mar. Good heavens, you are going to turn a phrase.

Count. Not at all. If you see nothing, evidently it is because you will not see.

Mar. See what?

Count. You can't but understand——

Mar. I only understand what people tell me, and even then I am hard of hearing.

Count. You laugh at everything; but, candidly, could it be possible, that after seeing you for a whole year, with your wit, your beauty, your grace——

Mar. But, good heavens! this is worse than a phrase;

it is a declaration. Warn me at least. Is it a declaration or a New Year's compliment?

Count. And suppose it were a declaration?

Mar. Oh, I don't want it this morning. I told you I was going to a ball; I run the risk of hearing some this evening, and my health won't stand that sort of thing twice a day.

Count. Truly you are discouraging, and I shall be heartily delighted when your turn comes to be caught.

Mar. I shall be delighted myself. I swear to you, there are instants when I would give large sums to have even a little vexation. Why, that's how I felt while my hair was being done, only just a few minutes ago. I was sighing as if my heart would break, from despair at having nothing to think of——

Count. Laugh away, laugh away; your turn will come.

Mar. Very possibly: we are all mortal. If I am reasonable, whose fault is that? I assure you, I don't try to prevent it.

Count. So you don't choose to be made love to?

Mar. No. I am very good-natured; but as for love-making, it is quite too stupid. Come now, you who have common sense, tell me what does this mean: making love to a woman?

Count. It means that the woman in question pleases you, and that you like to tell her so.

Mar. Very well; but what about the woman? Does it please her to please you? For instance, you think me pretty, let us suppose, and it amuses you to let me know

this. Well! what next? what does that prove? Is it a reason for me to love you? I imagine that if any one pleases me, that is not because I am pretty. What does he gain by these compliments? A pretty way, truly, to make a woman fall in love with you—to come and plant yourself in front of her with an eyeglass, look her over from head to foot, as if she were a doll in a shop window, and say to her very condescendingly: “Madame, I think you charming.” Add to that a few stale phrases, a waltz and a bouquet, and that is what they call making love to a woman. For shame! How can a man of brains take any pleasure in these sillinesses? It puts me into a passion when I think of it.

Count. Still there is nothing to get angry about.

Mar. On my word, there is. You must credit a woman with a very empty head and a great stock of stupidity to imagine that you can mix a charm for her out of such ingredients. Do you believe it is very diverting to pass one’s life in the midst of a deluge of insipidities, and to have one’s ears full of nonsense from morning to evening. Really, it seems to me that if I were a man, and saw a pretty woman, I should say to myself: “Here is a poor creature who is sure to be stifled with compliments.” I should spare her; I should have pity on her; and if I wanted to find favour, I would do her the honour to talk to her of something else than her unhappy face. But no, it is always “You are pretty,” and then “You are pretty,” and then “Pretty” again. Why, good heavens! we know it well enough. Shall I tell you the truth?—you men of fashion are nothing but confectioners in disguise.

Count. Well, Madame, you are charming, take it as you will.—There's another ring. Good-bye ; I am off.

Mar. Wait now ; I wanted to tell you—I forget what it was. Ah ! do you pass Frossin's by any chance in your wanderings ?

Count. It will not be by chance, Madame, if I can be of any use to you.

Mar. Another compliment. Heavens, how you bore me ! It is a ring I have broken. Of course I could simply send it, but I must explain to you. (*Taking the ring off her finger.*) There, do you see, it is the setting. There is a little point here, you see, don't you ? That used to open at the side, here. I knocked it against something this morning, and the spring got broken.

Count. Why, Marquise,—without wanting to be indiscreet—there was hair in it !

Mar. Very possibly. What are you laughing at ?

Count. I am not laughing the least bit in the world.

Mar. You are an impertinent creature ; it is my husband's hair. But I hear no one. Who was it rang again there ?

Count (*looking out of window*). Another little girl, and another band-box. One more bonnet, I presume. By the way, after all this, you owe me a confidence.

Mar. Do shut that door ; you are freezing me.

Count. I'm just going. But you promise to repeat what was said to you about me, don't you, Marquise ?

Mar. Come to the ball this evening, and we will have a talk.

Count. Parbleu! Yes; talk in a ball-room! A nice spot for conversation, with trombone accompaniment and a clatter of glasses of *eau sucrée*. Some one walks on your toe, some one else shoves your elbow, while a powdered lacquey stuffs an ice into your pocket. I put it to you, is that the place——?

Mar. Will you go or stay? I tell you again, you are giving me a cold. Since no one is coming, what drives you away?

Count (*shutting the door and sitting down again*). The fact is, do what I can, I feel in such bad humour that I am really afraid of wearing out your patience. Decidedly I must leave off coming to your house——

Mar. That is polite. And what has put that into your head?

Count. I don't know, but I bore you. You told me so yourself a moment ago, and I am quite conscious of it. What could be more natural? It is that unlucky lodging I have there opposite. I can't go out without looking at your windows, and I walk in here mechanically without reflecting what I come for.

Mar. If I told you, you were boring me this morning, that was because it is unusual. Seriously, you would pain me. I take great pleasure in seeing you——

Count. You? Not a bit. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going back to Italy.

Mar. Ah! And how will that suit mademoiselle?

Count. Mademoiselle who, please?

Mar. Mademoiselle—somebody. The young lady who

is your *protégée*. What do I know of your ballet-girls' names?

Count. Ah! So that is the fine story they have been telling you about me?

Mar. Precisely. Do you deny it?

Count. It is a pack of rubbish.

Mar. It is unfortunate that you were very distinctly seen at the play in the company of a certain pink hat with flowers that only bloom at the opera. You haunt the side-scenes, my neighbour; all the world knows that.

Count. Like your marriage with M. Camus.

Mar. You still harp on that.

Count. Well, why not?

Mar. M. Camus is a very worthy man. He is a millionaire several times over. His age, though it is venerable enough, is exactly right for a husband. I am a widow. He is a bachelor. He looks very well when he has his gloves on.

Count. And a nightcap. That is sure to suit him.

Mar. Will you be good enough to stop, please? Do people mention such things?

Count. Why yes, to any one who may see them.

Mar. Apparently it is those young ladies who teach you your pretty manners.

Count (getting up and taking his hat). Stop, Marquise, I must say good-bye. You would make me say something improper.

Mar. What excessive delicacy!

Count. No, but really you are too cruel; it is bad

enough to forbid me loving you, without accusing me of loving some one else.

Mar. Better and better. What a tragic tone! I forbade you to love me?

Count. Certainly; or to speak to you of it, at least.

Mar. Well, I give you leave. Let us hear your eloquence.

Count. If you meant that——

Mar. What does that matter to you, provided I say it.

Count. It matters this much, that even in joke some one here might very probably run a risk.

Mar. Oh, oh! Grave perils, monsieur?

Count. Perhaps, Madame. But unfortunately the danger would be only for me.

Mar. When one is afraid, one doesn't play at courage. Well, let me hear. You say nothing? You threaten me. I expose myself to your attack, and you don't stir. I was expecting at least to see you fling yourself at my feet like Roderigo or M. Camus himself. In your place, he would be there already.

Count. So it amuses you greatly to laugh at us poor folks?

Mar. And so it surprises you extremely that any one should dare to brave you to your face?

Count. Take care. If you are brave, I have been a hussar, let me tell you, Madame, and that not so very long ago.

Mar. Really! Very well then; by all means. A hussar proposal ought to be curious. I never saw one in all my life. Should you like me to call my lady's-maid? I

presume she will be able to take her part. You shall give me a performance. (*Bell heard.*)

Count. That jingle again. Good-bye, then, Marquise. At all events, I won't let you off so. (*He opens the door.*)

Mar. Till this evening, is it not? But what is that noise I hear?

Count (*looking out of the window*). It is a change in the weather. It is raining and hailing as hard as you please. There is a third bonnet coming for you, and I am greatly afraid there will be a cold inside it.

Mar. But is that din thunder? In the middle of January? How about the almanacs?

Count. No, it is only a hurricane, a kind of waterspout passing——

Mar. It is frightful. But do shut the door. You can't go out in this weather. What can cause such a thing?

Count (*shutting the door*). Madame, it is the anger of heaven chastising panes of glass, umbrellas, ladies' ankles, and the chimney-pots.

Mar. And my horses out!

Count. They are in no danger, unless something falls on their heads.

Mar. Oh, laugh away. It is your turn. I am a very neat person, Monsieur. I don't like my horses splashed. It is beyond belief. A moment ago there was the loveliest sky you could see——

Count. You may safely reckon, I can tell you, that with this hail you won't have any one here. There is one of your days wasted——

Mar. Not at all, since you came. Do put down your hat. It fidgets me.

Count. A compliment, Madame. Take care. You, who profess to hate them, might have yours taken for truth.

Mar. But I tell you so, and it is quite true. You give me great pleasure by coming to see me.

Count (*sitting down again near the Marquise*). Then let me love you.

Mar. But I tell you also, I am quite willing. It doesn't annoy me the least bit in the world.

Count. Then let me speak of it to you.

Mar. Hussar fashion, you mean?

Count. No, Madame. Be assured that even in default of heart I have enough good sense to respect you. But it seems to me that one has certainly a right without offending a person one respects——

Mar. To wait till the rain is over, you mean. You came in here a moment ago without knowing why. You told me so yourself. You were bored, you didn't know what to do, you might have passed for being tolerably sulky. If you had found three people here, any three, no matter who, you would be there by the corner of the fire, at the present moment, talking literature or railroads, after which you would go and dine. So it is because I was alone that you think yourself bound all on a sudden, yes, bound in honour to make love to me; this same eternal, intolerable lovemaking, that is so useless, so ridiculous, and so hackneyed an affair. Why, what have I done to you? Suppose a visitor comes in here, you will be witty, perhaps;

but I am alone, and there you are more commonplace than an old couplet out of a comic opera, and in a moment you broach your subject; and if I chose to listen to you, you would administer a déclaration to me—you would recite your love. Do you know what men look like under those circumstances? Like those poor hissed authors who have always a manuscript in their pockets, some unpublished and unplayable tragedy, and pull out this to batter your ears with it as soon as you are left alone with them for a quarter of an hour.

Count. So you tell me that I don't displease you. I reply that I love you, and there is an end of it to your mind.

Mar. You love me no more than the Grand Turk.

Count. Oh, come now, that is too much. Listen to me for a single moment, and if you don't believe me sincere——

Mar. No, no, and no again! Good heavens! do you think I don't know what you could tell me? I have the highest opinion of your studies; but do you think, because you are an educated man, that I have read nothing. Listen! I used to know a clever man who had bought somewhere or other a collection of fifty letters, not badly composed, very neatly written—love-letters of course. These fifty letters were graduated, so as to compose a sort of little novel in which all situations were foreseen. There were some for declarations, some for moods of spleen or hope, for the moments of hypocrisy when one falls back on friendship, for quarrels, for despairs, for fits

of jealousy, for sulkiness, even for rainy days like this. I have read these letters. The author professed, in a sort of preface, to have employed them on his own account, and never to have found a woman who resisted beyond the thirty-third number. Well! I resisted the whole collection. I ask you whether I am well read or no, and whether you flatter yourself you could have anything new to teach me.

Count. You have cloyed your palate, Marquise. You are jaded——

Mar. Insults? I prefer them; they are less insipid than your sugar-plums.

Count. Yes, the plain truth is you are jaded.

Mar. You think so. Well! not a bit of it!

Count. Jaded as an old Englishwoman with fourteen children.

Mar. As the feather that dances on my hat. So you imagine that it is a deep science to know you all by heart. Why, there is no study needed to learn that lesson; simply you have to be left to yourselves. Stop and think; it is a very simple calculation. Men chivalrous enough to respect our poor ears and never lapse into sugar-plums are extremely rare. Again, it cannot be disputed that in the sorry moments when you try to lie in an attempt to phrase, you are all as like one another as a row of cards. Happily for us, heaven's justice has placed at your disposal a very limited vocabulary. You have only one tune among you, as they say, so that the mere hearing of the same phrases, the mere repetition of the same

words, and the same studied gestures, the same tender looks, the mere spectacle of all these different faces which may in themselves be more or less passable, but at these fatal moments all assume the same humbly victorious expression, is enough to work our salvation by laughter, or at least by sheer weariness. If I had a daughter, and if I wished to guard her against what are called dangerous advances, I should take good care not to forbid her to listen to her partners' pastorals. I would simply tell her: "Do not listen to one only, listen to them all. Don't shut the book, don't mark the page: leave it open, let these gentlemen play their little farces to you. If by ill-luck there is one that pleases you, don't resist the feeling. Only wait; there will come another, identically the same, who will disgust you with the pair of them. You are fifteen, let me say. Well, my child, that will go on so till thirty, and it will be always the same thing." There is the history and the science I know; do you call this being jaded?

Count. Horribly so, if what you say is true; and it seems to me so far from natural that the doubt might be allowed.

Mar. What matter to me whether you believe or no?

Count. Better still. Is it really possible? What, you, at your age, despise love? The words of a man who loves you affect you like a trashy novel. His looks, gestures, sentiments, seem like a comedy to you. You pride yourself on candour, and you see nothing but lies in the rest of the world. But where do you come from, Marquise? who is it has given you these maxims of yours?

Mar. I have come a long way, neighbour mine.

Count. Yes, from your nurse. Women fancy they know everything in the world. They know nothing at all. I put the question to yourself—what experience can you have? That of the traveller who had seen a red-haired woman at his inn, and set himself to note in his journal: "The women have red hair in this country."

Mar. I begged you to put a log on the fire.

Count (*putting on the log*). That a woman should be a prude is conceivable; that she should say No, should stop her ears, should hate love, is possible; but to deny its existence, that is a pretty joke. You discourage a poor devil by telling him, "I know what you are going to tell me." But has he not the right to reply, "Yes, madame, you know perhaps; and I too know what men say when they love; but when I speak to you I forget it." There is nothing new under the sun. But I say in my turn, "What does that prove?"

Mar. Come, at least, this is better; you are talking capitally; it is the next thing to a book.

Count. Yes, I am talking; and I am assuring you that if you are such as it is your pleasure to seem, I pity you most sincerely.

Mar. Don't let me check you; make yourself at home.

Count. There is nothing in that to wound you. If you have the right to attack us, may we not reasonably defend ourselves? When you compare us to hissed authors, what is the stone you think you are throwing? Why, heaven help us! if love is a comedy——

Mar. The fire is burning badly; that log is crooked.

Count (arranging the fire). If love is a comedy, that world-old comedy, hissed or not, is still, after all is said and done, the least poor performance that has been invented. The parts are hackneyed, I admit; but if the play were worthless the whole universe would not know it by heart; and I am wrong to call it old. Is that old which is immortal?

Mar. Monsieur, this is poetry.

Count. No, Madame; but these stale speeches, this balderdash that bores you, these compliments, declarations, and all the doting nonsense are excellent old things, conventional if you like, wearisome if you like, sometimes ridiculous, but all of them accompaniments to another thing which is always young.

Mar. You are getting confused. What is it that is always old, and what is it that is always young?

Count. Love.

Mar. Monsieur, this is eloquence.

Count. No, Madame. I mean this: That love is eternally young, and that the ways of expressing it are, and will remain, eternally old. The worn-out formulas, the iterations, those tags of novels, that issue from your heart, you cannot say why, and all this pomp and circumstance, are just a procession of old chamberlains, old diplomats, old ministers, just the chatter of a king's ante-chamber; all these pass, but the king never dies. Love is dead, long live Love.

Mar. Love?

Count. Love. And even suppose one were merely fancying——

Mar. Give me the fire-screen there.

Count. This one?

Mar. No; the brocaded one. Your fire is putting out my eyes now.

Count (handing the screen to the Marquise). Even suppose it were merely fancy that one is in love, is not that a charming thing?

Mar. But I tell you it is always the same thing.

Count. And always new, as the song says. Why, what would you have us invent? Apparently you must be loved in Hebrew! That Venus there on your clock is also the same thing always; is she less beautiful for that, pray? If you are like your grandmother, are you the less pretty for that?

Mar. That's right, there is the chorus; pretty. Give me the cushion that is by you.

Count (taking the cushion and holding it in his hand). That Venus is made to be beautiful, to be loved and admired, that does not bore her in the least. If the splendid figure Milo conceived ever had a living model, assuredly that great strapping wench had more lovers than she needed, and let herself be loved like any one else, like her cousin Astarte, like Aspasia, and Manon Lescaut.

Mar. Monsieur, this is mythology.

Count (still holding the cushion). No, Madame, I cannot say how painful to me is the sight of this fashionable indifference, this mocking, disdainful coldness, this air of experience that reduces everything to nothing, in a young woman. You are not the first in whom I meet it;

it is a disease that is going the round of the drawing-rooms. People turn aside, or yawn like you at this moment, and say that love is a thing not to be talked of. Then why do you wear lace? What is that tuft of feathers doing in your head?

Mar. And what is that cushion doing in your hand? I asked you for it to put under my feet.

Count. Well then, there it is, and there am I too, and whether you will or no, I will make you a declaration, as old as the streets, and as stupid as a goose, for I am furious with you.

(He puts the cushion on the ground before the Marquise, and kneels down on it.)

Mar. Will you do me the favour to remove yourself from there, if you please?

Count. No; you must listen to me first.

Mar. You won't get up?

Count. No, no, and no again, as you said a moment ago, unless you consent to hear me.

Mar. I have the honour to wish you a good morning.
(Rising.)

Count (still on his knees). Marquise, in heaven's name, this is too cruel. You will madden me. You drive me to despair.

Mar. You will recover at the Café de Paris.

Count (in the same position). No, upon my honour. I speak from my heart. I will admit as much as you please that I came in here without any purpose. I only meant to pay you a passing visit; witness this door, that I opened three

times to go. The conversation we have just had, your raillery, your very coldness, drew me on further perhaps than was right; but it is not to-day only, it is since the first day I saw you that I have loved you, that I have adored you. There is no exaggeration in the words I use. Yes, for more than a year I have adored you. I have dreamed——

Mar. Adieu!

(Exit the Marquise, leaving the door open.)

Count (left alone, remains a moment longer on his knees, then rises and says:) It is a positive fact that that door is icy. *(He is going out, and sees the Marquise.)*

Count. Ah, Marquise, you are laughing at me.

Mar. (leaning against the half-open door). So you have found your feet.

Count. Yes; and I am going, never to see you again.

Mar. Come to the ball this evening. I am keeping a valse for you.

Count. I will never, never see you again. I am in despair; I am lost.

Mar. What is the matter with you?

Count. I am lost. I love you like a child. I swear to you, on all that is most sacred in the world——

Mar. Adieu! *(She is going out.)*

Count. It is for me to leave, Madame. Stay, I beg of you. I feel how much I have to suffer——

Mar. (in a serious tone). Let us make an end now, Monsieur. What do you want with me?

Count. Why, Madame, I wish, I should desire——

Mar. What? For, in short, you wear out my patience. Do you imagine that I am going to be your mistress, and succeed to your pink bonnets? I warn you that an idea of that kind does more than displease me. It is revolting.

Count. You, Marquise? Great heavens! if it were possible, it would be my whole life I would lay at your feet. It should be my name, my property, my honour itself, that I should wish to entrust to you. I, to confound you for a single instant, I do not merely say with those creatures of whom you only speak to vex me, but with any woman in the world: could you really suppose it? Do you believe me so devoid of sense? Has my levity or my folly gone so far then as to make you doubt my respect? Can you, who were telling me a moment ago that you took some pleasure in seeing me, felt perhaps some friendship for me; is it not true, Marquise? Can you think that a man whom you have thus distinguished, whom you have found worthy of so precious and so sweet an indulgence, would not know your worth? Why, am I blind, or mad? You my mistress? No, but my wife.

Mar. Oh! very well. If you had told me that on arriving we should not have quarrelled. So you want to marry me?

Count. Why, undoubtedly! I am dying to. I never dared to tell you, but for this last year I have been thinking of nothing else. I would give my life-blood to be allowed the faintest hope.

Mar. Wait now. You are richer than I.

Count. Oh, dear no, I don't think so. And what does

that matter to you? I entreat of you, don't let us talk of these things. Your smile at this moment makes me shiver with hope and fear. One word, for pity's sake. My life is in your hands.

Mar. I am going to tell you two proverbs. The first is, Never play at cross purposes. Consequently, we will talk it over.

Count. Then what I have dared to tell you does not displease you?

Mar. Oh no! Here is my second proverb: A door must be either open or shut. Now for three-quarters of an hour here has this door, thanks to you, been neither one nor the other, and the room is perfectly icy. Consequence again—you are going to give me your arm to take me to dine at my mother's. After that you will go to Frossin's.

Count. Frossin's, Madame? For what reason?

Mar. My ring.

Count. Ah, that is true! I had forgotten all about it. Well then, your ring, Marquise.

Mar. Marquise, you say. Well then, on my ring there happens to be in the setting a little Marquise's coronet, and as that may be used for a seal, tell me, Count, what do you think? Perhaps the strawberry leaves will have to be taken off. There, I am going to put on my bonnet.

Count. You overwhelm me with joy. How am I to express——?

Mar. But do shut that unhappy door. This room will never be fit to live in again.

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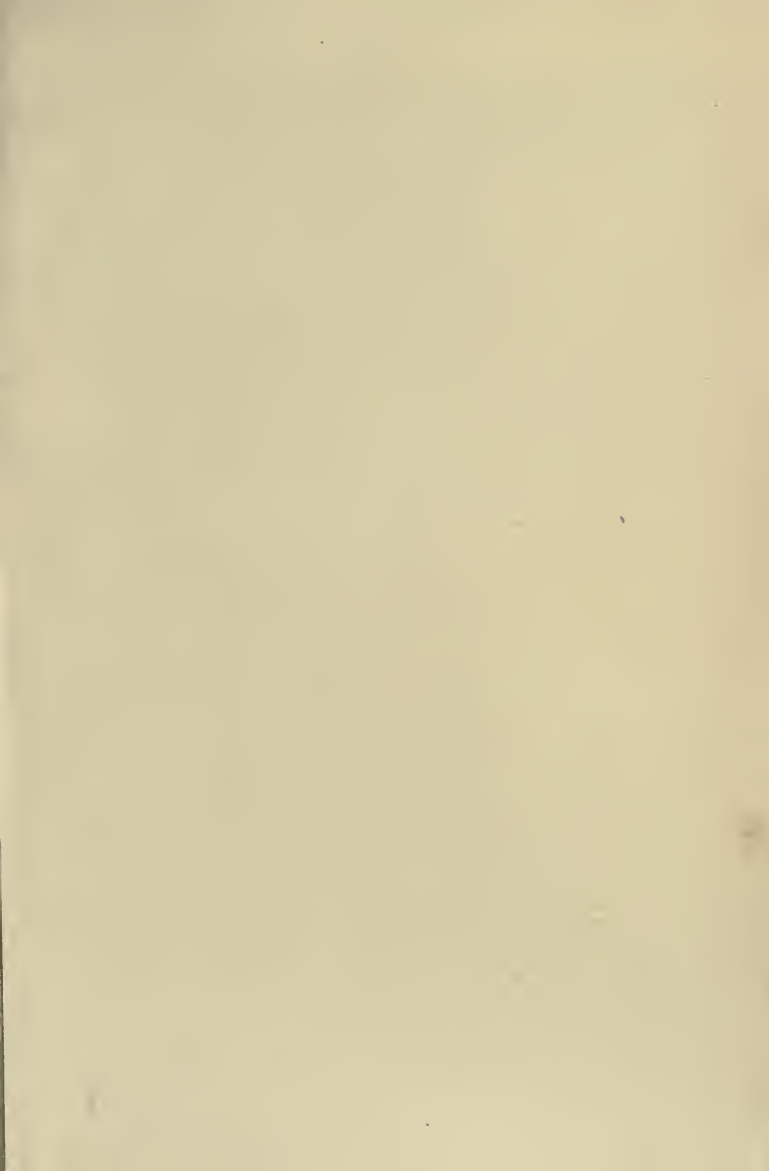
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